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**Media ethics in professional journalism:**

**Ethics and Moral judgment**

Conversation about religion and politics are the secure way to heat up the talks on any kind of gatherings. Ethics should be included as well on that list. Everybody has his/her stand about non-ethical and immoral actions, and arguments about morality creates more fire than shedding the light on open issues. When somebody discuss about ethical issues in the classroom or at the media seminars, conversation usually escalates into the passionate calling on *the freedom of the press or sympathies for the victims*. Judgments has been brought without previous detailed process of reasoning. In other words, does not have moral foundations.

***MORAL JUDGMENT***

Moral judgment or moral reasoning is systematic approach to the adoption of ethical decision. It is shaped within the forms of arguments and persuasion.

But, for example, if we try to discuss about the taste in clothing, that attempt would be addle, because about the questions of pure taste or opinion you cannot discuss rationally. But, we can, however, discuss rationally and arguably about moral judgments.

Moral judgment does not content only of offering the reasons for our convictions, intents and acts. Moral judgment is structural process, intellectual way to defend our ethical judgments from other people critics. Two different moral agents with related reasoning can come up to different, but equally conceivable conclusions about the best solution. *The beauty of moral judgment lies on the road towards the goal, and not just in the goal itself.*

If the moral judgment is so conscious process – after all, to think and to analyse takes time – how we can expect from professional journalists, who are working under the pressure of deadlines, to apply moral judgment?

It can be done through the learning of the techniques of moral judgment. However, neither one approach to moral rezoning, regardless how much is structured or detailed, is no guarantee of success in all circumstances.

Adoption of moral judgments ad solving of moral dilemmas requests balance of the very often badly defined opposit claims, usually under the circmustances that are not black and white.

Process of moral judgment can be conducted if the participants have knowledge and skills from the three areas:

***Moral context***

Context of moral judgment-should understand the context within which dilemma appears…Before our power for judgment can function on optimal level, we have to understand questions, facts, values, principles and moral obligations related to the case. To make it simple – context consists of all factors that can make influence on the individual to solve moral dilemma.

For example, when spokespersons of the White House (USA) consciously gives disinformation to the press to protect delicate foreign affairs negotiations, they have to know not just facts which can justify that kind of deception, but also have to be aware of social punishment for lying, and to be ready to justify their behaviors with some higher moral justification.

***Context of ethical dilemma***

Context of ethical dilemma can allude bringing of decision about our personal or professional behavior. To lie to a friend is not the same when you lie to get some information…System of the values in companies and code of conducts cannot be ignored during adoption of moral judgments. For example, before he/she promises to his source that he will not disclose his identity, journalist first has to be led with the Book of rules of Editorial board about that issue, as well on the stands and advices of his/her colleagues.

In the same time, Editorial board must consider certain pressure from the competition and economical pressure that are common for all media institutions – all factors which are unique for some dilemma makes context of ethical case.

***Critical thinking (***[***Media literacy***](https://sabihadzi.weebly.com/knjiga_bih-3132018.html)***)***

Connected with dilemma must exist critical thinking. It is an engine that starts machinery of moral judgment and takes us far away from reactions in a hurry and leads towards rational approach of decision making.

Critical thinking is a skill and can be learned becoming a media literate person. Critical thinking starts when the subject of analyses is known. For professional journalists that are involved within the process of moral judgment that means that they have to know the facts and context related connected with concrete event, know principles and practice within their profession, as well as moral theories which might be in use within the process of making of ethical decision. Also, those “critical thinkers” must be capable to identify problem (or recognize ethical questions) as well as to gather, analyze and synthesize all relevant information connected with problem. At the end critical thinking also requests that alternatives should be taken into the consideration and based on that decisions to be made. In way, that is the most difficult part of critical thinking, because it requests from us to make choices, the choices which might be heavily criticized by somebody else. But as the old merchant once said – even the best technique of negotiations does not mean anything if you do not sell your good. The same thing is for critical thinking – you can analyze some issue as longer you would like to do, but at the end of day decision must be made.

Component of critical thinking within the moral judgment encircles process of three phases – *a) – acquirement of knowledge and understanding of the context of ethical dilemmas; b) critical analyses of that knowledge and consideration of ethical alternatives and c)decision based on available alternatives.*

***Philosophical basis of moral theory:***

***From Ancient Greece up to rise of relativism***

Classical philosophy has direct importance for adopting of ethical decisions within the contemporary life and the following ethical theories had the biggest influence on philosophy of morality within the Western civilization: 1. Greek connection; 2. Judeo – Christian ethics and Ethics in Islam; 3. Kant and moral duty; 4. Allurement of utilitarianism ; Ethics of egalitarism; 6. Rise of relativism

*From* [*Ancient Greece*](https://www.iep.utm.edu/a-ethics/) *up to rise of* [*relativism*](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/)

Socrates believed that virtues can be identified and exercise. His student, Plato, claimed that the justice can be achieved with wisdom, calmness and with courage. That would practical mean: moral behavior should be based on the *experience and knowing of the world.*

Plato believed that “good” is value that is independent of the standards of behaviors which are in given moment dominant in the society. Who mentioned contemporary World?

Although through the years he was Plato’s student, Aristotle was more pragmatic from his teacher and he believed that moral virtues can be reached, but within that process some tough decision has to be made. Exercising of the virtues, due to Aristotle, depends on a way how you are doing that. That is why aims do not always justify the means. Aristotle philosophy is named as virtues ethics and it is based on the theory of golden mean.

Within the contemporary journalism concepts as the balance and honesty represents golden means. Also, forbidding of advertising of tobacco on TV, as well as printing of the warnings on the boxes of cigarettes, represents golden mean between embargo and do not do anything to decrease deleterious consequences of tobacco.

However, Aristotle admitted that not every actions can be considered as the golden mean: “*Just the names of certain things points out on evil-example of defiance, impudence and contempt, as well as actions like adultery, stealing or murder ”*\_he underlined. In other words, some actions are always wrong, and you cannot ask for golden mean. Aristotle virtue ethics put an accent on character. He believed that virtues can be realized through practice…through repetitive moral behavior, the concept of “good” is built in into the valuable system of individual. Because of that moral virtues are becoming to be way of thinking and acting.

[*Judeo-Christian ethics*](https://www.sermoncentral.com/content/Richard-Lee-7-Principles-Judeo-Christian-Ethic) *and* [*Ethics in Islam*](https://www.whyislam.org/social-ties-2/morality-ethics-in-islam/)

„Love your neighbor as yourself“… Judeo-Christian ethics characterization is love towards God and the whole humanity. According to that understanding, all moral decisions should be based on the respect of dignity of the persons as the goal, and not as the mean to come to the goal. Philosophy of the respecting of the people should be within the foundation of every ethical decision-making process. That advice should for sure be related to the journalists who put under the critics businesses of others and put their works in front of the eyes of the public. In Islam that is reflected in the following: *„It is serenity and the smile of the face, doing good and refraining of harassment and no to do evil things and inconveniences to others.”*

[*Kant and moral duty*](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/)

Immanuel Kant introduced ethical thought into the modern age and his theories are based on a term duty and that issue what he calls *categorical imperative*. Within the Metaphysics of Morals, he wrote: “I should never act in a way I do not want it to be universal one.” Concretely, moral agents should check principles that lies within the foundations of their acts and to decide if they want that to have universal application. If they want that, those principles become system of public morality that engage all members of the society. Kant’s theories are called moral philosophy based on duty – In other words, we have obligation to tell the truth, even if we can use that to harm another people.

[*Allurement of* utilitarianism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/utilitarianism-philosophy)

Jeremy Bantam and John Stuart Mil have introduced utilitarianism into the modern Western ethical thought. Utilitarianism from Latin word – utilis – useful is the course in the ethics that has starting point from the assumption that to have correct ethical act you have to increase overall happiness in the World, in other words to promote commonly good. Instead do watch an intention that is behind some act, as it was proposed by Kant, we must seek the best solution for the biggest number of people.

[Ethics of egalitarianism](https://www.iep.utm.edu/moral-eg/)

It is based on the apprehension that towards all persons should be treated equally in a sense of rights and possibilities. Minority point of views gets the same importance as majority ones. The goal is to protect weakest side within the relationship and to minimize the damage. For example, editor of the TV children show who decided to broadcast program for children without advertisement (children – the weakest side), from the respect to the psychologically vulnerable younger segment of the public.

Rise of relativism

[Bertrand Russell](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bertrand-Russell) and [John Dewey](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dewey/) have appeared as reaction on Kant’s absolutists ideas and accent the virtues of relative values. Very often this philosophy is called also “progressive” one. Dewey have convinced state school in USA (is that a merit of guilt, what do you think?) that they should not weight them with implanting of moral values into the children minds. Relativism consider that what is correct and good for one person does not need to be good and correct to another parson, and even under similar circumstances. However, if the mentioned is brought to the ultimate boundaries, relativism can lead towards moral anarchy under which individuals does not need to follow any kind of ethical standards. Less extreme point of view is by those who believes in certain moral principles, as it is to tell the truth, but they are ready for aberration if the circumstances allows them. That is why is used a term [Situational ethics](https://www.britannica.com/topic/situation-ethics) in USA.

Question to think about:

***So, if the moral judgment is conscious process, how we can expect from professional journalists, who are under the pressure of deadline, to apply moral judgment?***

Next: Media ethics and professional journalism: *ETHICAL THEORIES WITHIN MORAL JUDGMENT*