Assoc. Prof. Dr. & Dr. Honoris Causa

Sabahudin Hadžialić

**Media ethics in professional journalism:**

**Term and Types of Ethics – II part**

**ETHICAL DECISIONS**

For most journalists, being objective is a must and it is a shrine, but also exist the acceptations of the stand that absolute objectivity is illusion. That is why journalists accepted on a less philosophical demanding definition that enables them to conduct their job without a feeling that they have made a mistake. Due to that realistic point of view on objectivity, journalists aspire to keep outside their report’s, personal sympathies and opinions, to achieve balance within reporting and to rely on credible and responsible sources. According to that traditional point of view, media ethics is related on facts and impartiality within carrying out of those facts.

* *Ethical decisions within the context (political, social  
  and cultural climates)*
* *Motives of the* [*moral agent*](https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/moral-agent) *(popularity vs. consequences)*

[Ethical decisions](https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-89) are always made within a certain context which includes political, social and cultural climate. Although context does not determine automatically the outcome of the ethical judgment, it surely does have influence which cannot be ignored. De facto, the factors of the context, very often, are creating internal morality conflict of the stands of our conscience about what we should do and what is popular to be done.

Also, we have to question as well motives of the moral agent (moral agent are those who are making ethical decisions, regardless if they are acting independently or as representatives of some institutions, and all communicators are becoming to be moral agents when they put in conflict ethical dilemmas of their professions and when they have to take full responsibility for their acts) because good motives sometimes might be used to justify something that looks like non-ethical act.

For example, journalist can discover a case of corruption in the government – that is journalistic techniques which majority of us would tolerate (or even greeted) in the name of public good. However, motives cannot be analyzed only based on their popularity or acceptance in public but should have a vie on them in regards the consequences of the act.

* *The act as the component of human behavior within the process of communication (credibility, integrity and civility)*

The act is component of the behavior within the process of communication. The act is something that attracts our attention through the acting of others and can lead us to describe their acts as ethical or non-ethical. Acts can be verbal, as when reporter lies about the sources of the information, or non-verbal, as when advertisers omits essential information about the product which might help a buyer to make decision in regards buying the product. Or if, on some TV station it has been provided a voting about certain issue through text messaging and in the same time, with really negligible size of the letters list the price of the telephone call and by doing that to avoid doubt “to call or not” and to have telephone calls to be received exclusively because of that question.

Ethical solution should be judged in a sense of relations of moral agent with person or persons or public on which, in ethical way, is directly influenced. For example, magazine that is addressing to the sophisticated readers could easily include a statement that is consisting of bawdry speech, but some local newspaper must avoid or censor that kind of statement. Remember, we mentioned earlier some political, social and cultural influences…

* *Stimulation of moral imagination*
* *Identification of ethical issues*
* *Development of analyticity*
* *Gaining of the feeling of moral obligation and personal responsibility*

Earlier I wrote about cynics, skeptics and optimists when the issue of learning of the ethics is in the question, but what should be the context of the course of media ethics?

*First* – [Stimulation of moral imagination](https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/moral-imagination) – Module of media ethics promotes understandings that those moral choices makes an important part of human existence and that consequences of ethical decision can bring to the happiness or suffering. Ethical responsibility of journalist is ***double*** – *first* to act in accordance with professional standards and *secondly*, to persist on any kind of outside pressure that brings into the question the rights of the citizens to be informed about everything and it is of public importance within the community. Their responsibility is complicated simultaneously with interweaving two more responsibilities: responsibility towards the owners of the media and responsibility towards the public. All mentioned is excellent stimulation of moral imagination.

*Second* – Identification of ethical issues – Although majority of us believes that we know to make difference between right and wrong, we are not always in situation to recognize moral dimensions of certain situation. Or, sometimes, simply we allow prejudices or personal interests to confuse our moral compass. Readiness on eventual dilemmas is important aim of ethical education and of the process of moral judgments. Of course, certain ethical abridgments are subject to changes. Standards of professional behavior are constantly changing in a way how journalists are adjusting their moral compasses in accordance with the circumstances that are changing.

*Third* – Development of analyticity – Ability of judgment is of the key for the solving of the problems in the mathematics and behavioral sciences: the same could be said for moral philosophy.

*And fourth* - Gaining of the feeling of moral obligation and personal responsibility – American president Hari Truman kept on his desk a sign [“The buck stops here”](https://www.trumanlibrary.org/buckstop.htm) (description of that is “You cannot lay the responsibility on other one”). It was the phrase of the simple dictionary and deep meaning with which president Truman was bespeaking to everybody who wanted to listen that he unreservedly accepts responsibility for the acts of the executive power. By doing that he confessed unique moral truth: you cannot delegate the responsibility. As moral agents we are responsible for our acts and we must not blame others for bad ethical assessments or procedures. Journalist very often put freedom above responsibility. Ethics help us within the corrections of mentioned imbalance.

*Does the proper Ethical decision meet goal of professional journalism as such?*

***ETHICAL VALUES AND STANDS***

There are three moral markers that are fundamental in journalism, when the ethics is in question: ***credibility, integrity and civility.***

To be credible means that be a trustful person and on whom you have confidence. From the ethical point of view, credibility is the starting point within our treatment towards others and full membership within the moral community.

Integrity is also key factor of moral development. Stephen L. Carter defines [integrity](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/712327.Integrity) as: a) making differences between good and bad; b) acting on the basis of observed differences, and even on a personal damage and c) open talks that you are acting on the bases of making differences of good and bad. Of course, as we stated before, to this should be added readiness for taking over of the responsibility for your own affairs.

Civility might be described as “the first principle of morality”, because of the reason that encircles the stand about devotion and respect of others. Those ideas reflect within all leading religions in the world. Problem is, as always, in implementation of what has been written in the holy books, isn’t it? At the XVI century, Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote that “civility is what makes us possible to live together as society. It encircles composition of the rules, very often on conventions, that makes apparatuses for the interaction with others.

* *Values and stands as components of ethical attitudes*

Values and stands as components of ethical values and stands...Moral value is something that is „*appreciated, valuable, about which you have very high opinion, or something that is equally good*“ – as spoken by the side of [Peter Angeles and written within the Dictionary of philosophy](https://www.amazon.com/Dictionary-Philosophy-Peter-Adam-Angeles/dp/0064634612). Autonomy, justice and dignity of human life are the examples of values that are most important to the largest part of the society. Objectivity and honesty are often quoted as the basic values of journalistic works. However, if we take example of movie director [Jean Luc Godard](https://www.scribd.com/doc/210702164/The-Films-of-Jean-Luc-Godard-pdf) who flauntingly noticed that journalists, in the name of objectivity, kept to the logic the Nazi reign: one minute to Hitler, one minute to Jewish. Can that be justified with objectivity and equal presence in the public through the media? Of course, from the upper, universal standpoint, that cannot be justified because in that way exists equalization of the equitable and inequitable, good and evil.

In regards the values we have problem of journalistic and media neutrality. Is it possible to be neutral in certain cases – especially in those cases in which the violence, crime, hearted and discrimination are affirmed. [Philip Breton](https://www.thirdconceptjournal.co.in/current-issue-pdf/sales-services-august-2016.pdf) has underlined that „*under the mask of division of work and professional ideology supported by so call neutralism, media are becoming most suitable mean for the spreading of xenophobic amalgams*”, which can devastatingly act upon the public. Breton’s words can be portrayed on the area of any xenophobic territories in the World: “*We are the best, but we do not know in what. What is more favorable one stand of one group about itself, it will be more unfavorable in regards all other groups, with a tendency for accusing others for the all misfortune of their group, and from there raises possibilities to have a conflict with other groups, and every conflict even more strengthen distrust and hatred*.”

* *Main sources which influence establishing of our ethical values and stands are family, belonging to the group, role models and social institutions*

Process through which all mentioned influences – family, belonging to the group, models and institutions – introduces individual into the norms and conventions of the society or sub-group is called socialization. For example, when academic institution punishes students for cheating on exams, it does intensify values of honesty, what is the first principle of the moral code of our culture. Socialization is activity that last the entire life and serves as the factor of social control in a way that gives certain homogenization of moral values.

However, our stands in regards some situation does not determine always our moral judgments, which points that belonging to the group and institutional influence sometimes have an advantage over the values which we consider important. Example: Editor of the magazine who aggressively was for separation and outshining of the bigger amount of the money for the combat against drugs might, anyway, close his eyes in front of the Head of marketing which will contract advertising of alcoholic drinks in the magazine. There are many reasons for discrepancy between *belief and behavior* but, those reasons, at least, conserve conflict of ethical values.

Some questions to think about:

* Do our stands connected with certain situation, that we are faced as journalists, always determine our moral judgments?
* Does the today’s Ethics in professional journalism responds to the established expectations or is it just a wishful thinking?
* Is the application of the Ethics the presumption of professional journalism, or...?
* Does the proper Ethical decision meet goal of professional journalism as such?
* Do our stands connected with certain situation, that we are faced as journalists, always determine our moral judgments?

*…It will be continued*