

ETHICAL COMMUNICATION: FUNDAMENTS AND PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS AND JOURNALISM

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Abstract

In this article we establish the ethical dimension of communication for professions such as public relations and journalistic communication as a fundamental part of those professions. By definition, both journalism and public relations are professions with moral finality. In practice, they must apply the principles of classical ethics as well as the norms of conduct in their deontological codes that logically derive from classical ethics. In the absence of ethical conduct, no journalists or pr specialists may call themselves professionals, since morality is intrinsic to both. Their communication must be ethical or must not be all. In the same way the profession of medicine cannot be understood in the absence of the Hippocrates Oath, neither Journalism nor Public Relations may be understood in the absence of strict morality.

Keywords: *ethical communication, social responsibility, public interest, virtue ethics, utilitarian ethics, duty ethics, justice ethics, love ethics.*

Professions differentiate from other forms of occupational activities by subscribing to an ethical code of practice. From this perspective, professionalism is not only applying intellectual knowledge in a line of work, but also applying the ethical principles in every single professional act. The public expects this from the practitioner of every profession.

This philosophical approach of the profession as being an ethical occupation is best described by Socrates. Every profession is best described by the moral component, synthesized by Michael Davis as follows: “A profession is a number of individuals in the same occupation voluntarily organized to earn a living by openly serving a moral ideal in a morally permissive way, beyond what law, market, morality, and public opinion would otherwise require.” Thus, a profession is a collective undertaking submitted to moral principles so that the entire community prospers from that undertaking. No occupation that contradicts morality, such a thievery, can be called a

profession, although it is an activity that provides income (Davis, 2010).

From ancient times, medicine was a profession highly regarded as an occupation of doing good, and the Hippocratic Oath contains the moral and ethical duties of a medicine man in exercising his profession. We insert the text below:

I swear by Apollo Physician and Asclepius and Hygieia and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will fulfil according to my ability and judgment this oath and this covenant:

To hold him who has taught me this art as equal to my parents and to live my life in partnership with him, and if he is in need of money to give him a share of mine, and to regard his offspring as equal to my brothers in male lineage and to teach them this art - if they desire to learn it - without fee and covenant; to give a share of precepts and oral instruction and all the other learning to my sons and to the sons of him who has instructed me and to pupils who have signed the covenant and have taken an oath according to the medical law, but no one else.

I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment; I will keep them from harm and injustice.

I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy. In purity and holiness I will guard my life and my art.

I will not use the knife, not even on sufferers from stone, but will withdraw in favor of such men as are engaged in this work.

Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick, remaining free of all intentional injustice, of all mischief and in particular of sexual relations with both female and male persons, be they free or slaves.

What I may see or hear in the course of the treatment or even outside of the treatment in regard to the life of men, which on no account one must spread abroad, I will keep to myself, holding such things shameful to be spoken about.

If I fulfil this oath and do not violate it, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and art, being honored with fame among all men for all time to come; if I transgress it and swear falsely, may the opposite of all this be my lot.

Translation from the Greek by Ludwig Edelstein. From The Hippocratic Oath: Text, Translation, and Interpretation, by Ludwig Edelstein. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943 (Hippocratic Oath).

Many of the principles of the Hippocrates oath are applied nowadays, such as keeping professional secrecy or forbidding private intimate relations with the patients. Others are controversial subjects, such as abortion and euthanasia. Today, in universities around the world, graduate students take the Hippocrates oath in its modern form as taking this oath is a necessary condition for the young doctors to start their professional carriers. Medicine as profession is more than the sum of knowledge required by a doctor in order to practice well and save lives, it is also respecting the values associated to the profession of medicine, such as respect for life, charity, compassion, equal treatment to those in need of medical assistance etc. Breaking the oath is blamed by society and the doctor who breaks the oath can no longer call himself a true doctor. We present below the modern version of the Hippocrates oath:

I swear to fulfill, to the best of my ability and judgment, this covenant:

I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.

I will apply, for the benefit of the sick, all measures which are required, avoiding those twin traps of overtreatment and therapeutic nihilism.

I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug.

I will not be ashamed to say „I know not, “ nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient's recovery.

I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know. Most especially must I tread with care in matters of life and death. If it is given me to save a life, all thanks. But it may also be within my power to take a life; this awesome responsibility must be faced with great humbleness and awareness of my own frailty. Above all, I must not play at God.

I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being, whose illness may affect the person's family and economic stability. My responsibility includes these related problems, if I am to care adequately for the sick.

I will prevent disease whenever I can, for prevention is preferable to cure.

I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm.

If I do not violate this oath, may I enjoy life and art, respected while I live and remembered with affection thereafter. May I always act so as to preserve the finest traditions of my calling and may I long experience the joy of healing those who seek my help.

(Written in 1964 by Louis Lasagna, Academic Dean of the School of Medicine at Tufts University, and used in many medical schools today.) (Hippocratic oath, modern version).

The reason we presented the case of the Hippocrates oath in medicine is to underline that, since Ancient times, being a professional meant having a moral or an ethical conduct and that the characteristic is valid nowadays as well and extends to every profession.

But what is morality? Or what is ethics? Morality comes from the Latin *mos* (genitive *moris*) one's disposition, customs, manners, morals. Nowadays, the term means *morally good, conforming to moral rules* (Online etymology dictionary, moral). It also means *having an ethical conduct*. Etymologically, *ethics* comes from the Ancient Greek *ethos*, which meant *moral character, custom*, and the "moral principles of a person or group" (Online etymology dictionary, ethic). *Ethos* also meant *the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institute* (Merriam-Webster, ethos) and *the fundamental character or spirit of a culture; the underlying sentiment that informs the*

beliefs, customs, or practices of a group or society (Dictionary, ethos). Thus, we cannot speak of society or society practices in the absence of ethics and morality. We understand from the definitions above that ethics and morality can be defined one through the other, since both of them refer to the normative regulation of conduct, but there are also differences between them.

For instance, in the case of ethics, the accent falls on the analysis of the moral norms for the purpose of finding a solution to a certain conduct. Ethics is *a study of the moral values and norms of conduct* and the accent falls on the theoretical investigation of the moral principles. In the case of morality, the accent falls on the social dimension of following the rules (Frunză, 2011). Another difference comes from the fact that, while ethics studies the values and norms with the purpose of prescribing human conduct, and while morality, too, has the purpose of regulating human conduct, morality goes beyond the sphere of human action in order to reach the field of knowledge. Morality is a philosophical and religious system in which the concept of *good* is intertwined with that of *truth* (Stere, 1998). Ethics is therefore not a philosophical system, but a philosophical discipline that designates the theoretical dimension, the principles and their adjustment to practical life and which contains a series of regulations and recommendations for practical life (Frunză, 2011).

In different professions, applying moral values in daily activities is called *applied ethics* or *deontology*. The term comes from the Latin *deon*, meaning duty, obligation, alongside with suffix *logos*, meaning *science or word, reason, theory*. Deontology is thus the branch of ethics that studies the norms and obligations specific to a certain profession. It is also a theory on duty and moral obligation. Deontology refers to institutionalized ethics, professional ethics, management ethics (Frunză, 2011). The deontological codes are made of the norms assumed by a certain professional group and allow the individualization of that specific profession among others, as well as of the groups that assumed the code in question. Deontology is thus part of defining a profession, because being professional involves, along with a *know-how* component, having an ethical conduct, a *know-what is morally correct to do*.

The traditional professions transpose the shared values and norms of conduct into codes of ethics, called *deontological codes*. Therefore, the professional conduct is evaluated according to the established codes of conduct. The constant objective of these codes of conduct is to protect the beneficiaries of the services rendered, as well as the profession itself, namely the privileges, such as social status and professional collegiality. Not applying the deontological principles is not punished by law unless their prescriptions coincide, but the professional sanctions applied may go as to the exclusion of one from the professional associations (Frunză, 2011).

Deontological codes are a large part of the ethical fundamentals of communication professions, such as public relations or journalism.

As far as the public relations are concerned, unlike medicine, they are not yet recognised unanimously as a profession. In Romania, they are still to be theorised. The debates carried out to license public relations as a profession have as main topic their definition as *a major state interests and freedom of expression of the practitioner*. Lacking institutional accreditation, the programs to certify public relations as a profession are elaborated by specialised associations: at international level, we have The International Public Relation Association (IPRA) and in our country - The Romanian Association of Public Relations (ARRP), a non-profit organisation that promotes professional standards, encourages social communication and consolidates the public trust in public relations activities (Hariuc et al., 2004). Among the professional criteria also included is the elaboration of deontological codes. They are the consequence of professional development and of the sense of cohesion and they contain precisely the professional standards for practicing public relations. Their purpose is to obtain moral qualification and promote the ethical behaviour in relation to the public, they introduce and maintain the sense of responsibility among the practitioners in their activities. The development of professional ethics is reflected in the large number of codes regarding the standards for public relations. In Romania, we have *Codul de Practica Profesionala in Relatii Publice al Asociatiei Române a Profesionişilor în Relatii Publice* approved on the 29th of May 2008. This code, as Sandu

Frunză asserts, follows the moral pattern of every deontological code, namely it is conceived as a *moral contract*. The necessity of such a regulation derives from the great complexity of the activities the public relations practitioner engages in and their special difficulties. Only by being sensitive and sensible can the public relation practitioner avoid breaking of the deontological norms. Lobby for law influence, implementing social and political campaigns, influencing institutional and personal behaviour, all these are delicate matters and some of them can prove to be quite a dilemma (Frunză, 2011).

According to some authors, such as Dumitru Borțun, (Borțun, 2005) the public relation profession is not only based on a deontological code, but it defines itself through ethical concepts. The specificity of public relations is ethical communication, unlike other forms of communications, such as manipulation or propaganda. In public relations, *the communicational model is symmetrical and bidirectional*. The specificity of this model is that the feedback is not only an instrument for the study the possibilities of reaching the organisational goals, but it is also a way to identify the public needs that can be satisfied by the politics practised by the organisation. The public interest counts in equal measure and the public relations obtain performance only if they mediate between the two types of interests in order to reach an equilibrium point. The communication may be initialised by the organisation or its public and we can no longer talk about a control from one of the two, which means that communication is bidirectional and symmetrical. The organisation and its public establish a long lasting partnership in which both assume certain responsibilities.

The bilateral symmetrical model is a model of dialogue. Pearson explored the concept of dialogue and found it to be an *ethical fundament* for public relations. In his opinion, public relations are best defined as *the management of interpersonal dialectics*, once they have the function of building direct relations to the public. In a broader sense, dialogue is regarded as a continuous process of seeking understanding and relationship with the potential of solving

dilemmas through the bilateral uncovering of truth (Bowen, 2009).

The integrated model of public relations started from the above premises, its specificity being defined by four instances that focus on maintaining a healthy climate in the process of public communication: education, professional associations, licence and accreditation and the professional conduct codes - the ingredients that differentiate public relations communication from other forms of speech (Pricopie, 2003).

Understanding the impact of public relations on society, mainly the aspects that increase or decrease their social utility, is one of the issues always to be taken account of by the public relations practitioner (Hariuc et al., 2004). The concept of *social responsibility* is a key concept in every profession, the more so in public relations, since social responsibility increases with power. As a function of the *strategic management*, public relations have the power of orienting an organisation so that both the organisation and its environment prosper. The organisations are addicted to the environment they activate in. A value-based orientation such as social responsibility and not one based exclusively on economical values will lead to an increase of the organisation on long term. This is why, nowadays, organisations value social responsibility more than economical value.

Sandu Frunză considers that the concept of social responsibility has always had different connotations, but that it always regarded the need of an ethically based reconstruction of economical relations in a society. Ethical significance involves an ethical reconstruction among individuals, individuals and organization, organizations, organizations and the community, the world and the cosmos (understood as a life supporting environment). Thus, social responsibility is a combination of ethical communication and an ethical reconstruction of society and even of the world (Frunză, 2011).

The concept of social responsibility also applies to Journalistic communication. The Social responsibility of The Media concerns more than ethical aspects of the media, it concerns media responsibility in solving social problems. Mass media are perceived more and more as a factor of social change, and journalists - as the agents

responsible for that change. The journalists are often put in a position similar to that of an organisation that must choose between being a simple economical agent trying to maximize economical profits or to maximize such profits as social responsible agents. A way of overcoming ethical dilemmas by journalists is the fact that an ethical behaviour assures a higher sustainability and that an ethical conduct is actually part of the logic of free market economy. For an appropriate ethical conduct, journalists, too, have the important tool of deontological codes (Frunză, 2011). In Romania, there are The Deontological Code of The Journalist, adopted by The Romanian Press Club and The Convention of Media Organisations and Journalist Status adopted, in Sinaia, in 2004.

Along with Michael Davies, we return to the Socratic definition of profession in order to see its applications to journalism. Journalists belong to a profession that collects, analyses and reports the news in the service of a fair and comprehensive account of recent events, by maintaining themselves to an ethical standard beyond that set by law, market or public opinion (Davis, 2010).

Mass media have become the *Fourth Estate*, and, like the other three powers of state in the European government system, grant the democratic system. In general terms, mass media have the role of maintaining democracy and not that of undermining it. The theoretical ethical discussions bring out the need to correct such undemocratic practices and to bring benefits to the public based on high journalistic standards. David Berry thinks that media cannot be separated from society. Usually, "responsibilities are seen to be the product of an individual and not of external forces, such as the state" (Berry, 2008).

Moreover, the matter of responsibility gets complicated by the fact that the journalist is the mediator between the commercial interests of the owner of the media trust and the public. Nevertheless, "the community exists and its members have certain interests that information is required to fulfil". Quite often, responsibility is confused with duty, but they both have different theoretical fundamentals and applications. The first is volunteering, the second is a demand. Responsibility allows the individual to take the

final decision, whereas duty asks for submission. To develop the consciousness of social responsibility is another matter, developing an awareness of responsibility rests on a self-decision-making process and it involves regarding the individual part of a community of speakers in which actions or words may affect others. But, whereas the concept of responsibility may be ignored, duty cannot be ignored. The concept of duty relates to that of public interest, as it is thought that one has a duty or moral obligation to perform ethically, because the public interest demands so. The public interest is what journalists and politicians use to justify their actions. The public interest is perceived as *an interest that is common to all and is central to the idea of the common good* (Berry, 2008).

On this idea, Public Journalism (mainly in the U.S.) lays stress on the community, called *representative journalism* and offering an alternative to E.U. Journalism by encouraging the public participation to the democratic process. The E.U. journalism is also interested in supporting the democratic system, but here the danger of following financial interests instead of the public interest is greater (Berry, 2008). In post-communist Romania, several pathologies of the media can be identified, such as prolongation of estate regulation of the media by political domination of the entire public zone, including the media, by choosing the themes that become public, usually sensational ones, to block out the inconvenient themes. The lack of regulation has led to an almost savage capitalism, thus Bondor wonders whether we shouldn't open for the debate the development of public media system. Debate within the public sphere as a *habermasian* one - a space defined by the participation to endless debate on public matters - is necessary (Bondor, 2011). One must not confuse the public interest or public's right to know, with seeking what is sensational, or with satisfying the appetite for the sensational that so often the media do this.

Reporting suffering in journalism is difficult, but journalists are confronted with such cases every day (crime, accidents, suicide, war) and must address the family members of those who were killed. Suffering has become a main attraction for the public and it rates very well, however description of such cases should not

satisfy the public need for the sensational, but increase awareness and generate compassion. The experience of pain is a personal one and cannot be communicated easily. Often, the reaction to sufferance is that of shame and the tendency is to avoid being seen. To expose the suffering person to the public eye is to increase their sufferance and to publicly humiliate him. The Romans used this extensively, by means of the crucifixion which exposed death. The public could show at best pity, mercy or compassion. Pity is associated with condescension - the lack of suffering for the one who shows mercy. On the other hand, compassion means to be hurt and touched by the suffering of the other. The term *miser cordia* ad litteram means *to have a merciful heart* and it refers to the virtue of having the capacity of grief and sorrow when the others feel pain, to become aware of it and of his needs. Nowadays, even war journalism has become a sort of *visual pornography* and contempt to those in suffering, with no moral engagement of the journalist who should bear witnessing with compassion and integrity (Sanders, 2003).

In the case of war journalism, truth is the most important value, even at the cost of national survival, since democracy should maintain awareness of the importance of truth, otherwise war could diminish democracy and perpetuate ideology and propaganda. In the case of war, journalism contributes to the maintenance of democracy more as it does in time of peace, and war cannot be seen as a special case of media communication. In the case of war, the legitimacy of the journalistic act is, in a democratic society, the public interest and the public right to that information. Some argue that nations should be protected by the damage they are causing, but the nations must be aware of the suffering and damage done to, in order to take decision based on factual information. Some journalist practice self-censorship from a feeling of patriotism, but it is important to tell the truth, no matter what that truth disadvantages. This is the only way to protect democracy (Williams, 2006).

But not all journalists deal with war, most of them deal with daily suffering in peace time. Most people agree that it is acceptable to relate about human suffering but this depends on the presentation way: relating sufferance is telling a story about life, creating an emotional bond with

the one in sufferance in order to generate compassion. The story is well told if it captures the personal dimension of the tragedy, Karen Sanders believe (Sanders, 2003). Relating sufferance should increase social solidarity and cohesion, not just offering a show of pain. Journalists must contribute to social cohesion, not to public's sensational thrilling. The same problem in journalism concerns intrusion in one's private life. We may live in a voyeurist society, but this is no reason to satisfy public's appetite for sadism or their curiosity. The media must act to society's best interest, and must always have in mind the moral destination of their communication. In the deontological codes, all issues addressed above are well regulated.

The deontological codes offer practical solutions for ethical communications, but, as applied ethics, its origins lie in theoretical ethics. All classical ethics have one guideline principle, namely that the ethical behavior leads to personal and social happiness. There are several ethical paradigms that we must assume in order to have a moral conduct, namely Virtue Ethics (Aristotle), Love Ethics (Christianity), Duty Ethics (Kant), Utilitarian Ethics (Mill) and Justice Ethics (Rawls). All these ethics offer a way to obtain personal happiness as well as happiness for all members of the society.

Virtue Ethics' key concepts - virtue, happiness and practical wisdom - come from Aristotle's philosophy of the Golden mean. For Aristotle, virtue is the happy mean between extremes, the way of moderation. Happiness can be achieved when the balance between extremes is achieved. The happy man is the virtuous man that takes pleasure in doing good, in virtue itself, the man that always acts according to virtue his entire life. Happiness is destined to man, as the imperative of reason is written in his structure, it is what man shares with the gods, and reason is the way to obtain moderation and virtue. Man has the duty to be happy. Happiness is not a possession or a way of being, but an activity, the activity of the soul modeled by virtue. Happiness and pleasure cannot be separated, pleasure is the basis of happiness and the most pleasurable of all activities is, for the virtuous man, that of doing good. Pleasure is the natural consequence of what

we love. Thus, for the virtuous man who loves justice, justice gives birth to pleasure. Virtue is the disposition to choose a moderate conduct (Stere, 1998). There are two kinds of virtues: *ethic and dianoethic* (moral, intellectual). The second are virtues such as prudence (practical wisdom), and the first include courage, moderation, truthfulness, patience, proper ambition, righteous indignation, generosity, friendliness, all of which are a mean between the too much and the not enough, such as courage is a mean between cowardice and rashness, generosity is a mean between stinginess and extravagance, and so on. To evaluate ethically a person is to assess how virtuous that person is, to evaluate an action is to assess if that action is done in agreement with virtue. For a communication to be considered ethical, it would require to be done in agreement with truth, friendliness and so on. Summed up as a principle, *be moderate, be virtuous!*

Love ethics comes from the Christian virtue of love, the ultimate virtue that includes all the others - since when you have the love of the others you automatically have an appropriate and virtuous behavior. Love is at the basis of society since it makes family and friendship possible. The Italian expression *ti voglio bene*, namely *I wish you well, I wish for your well being*. Love is that feeling when one values the other as one values oneself or more. Christianity sums it up in the second commandment *Love your neighbor as you love yourself!* Our neighbor is all the people, including one's enemies. In Christianity, man is a creation of divine love, love was the motivation of creation. Man being made in God's own image, loving one's neighbor and oneself is loving God. Christ's behavior is a model for all humans, as he sacrifices himself for humanity, as his will is the same with God's will. The New Testament comes with a revolutionary concept for its age: love of enemies, offering of love to those who do not share it themselves. Love is not about being mutual, but about being tolerant and forgiving. When Christianity appeared, concepts such as equality between all people were strange and hard to accept, thus a major paradigm change took place, a Nietzschean inversion of values. An Ethical communication will be, from this perspective, one of tolerance, without any kind of hate speech and without violence. As a result, such communication would prove to be more effective

on the long run, since it is when you answer violence with violence when a vicious circle is unbreakable, but when you practice tolerance communication is more efficient.

Kant's Ethics of Duty can be summed up by his *categorical imperative*, which states: *Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law*. This new moral concept is supposed to be *a priori* (prior to experience), a universal principle. Man's privilege is reason and, as a reasonable being, man must motivate his moral actions. The only reason is, in Kant's view, the one on which objectives norms of conduct can be founded on. The formal categorical imperative may sound fancy, but it is to be understood in relation to the well known proverb *Do not do to others what you do not like to be done to yourself*: the latter is based upon empirical and subjective experience, whereas the first is absolute. The respect and the will for the law in its formal aspect must constitute the fundament and principle of moral life. The moral law is thus invested with supreme dignity. There is a *good will* that refuses all the actions that are spontaneous or natural and that is autonomous. The good will acts upon duty (and not according to duty) and obeys an imperative and universal law without any suspicion of egocentricity. Not only the action itself, but the motivation, too, is decisive in assessing morality. Only when motivation is right, the man is indeed free. For Kant, freedom is an essential condition for the exercise of moral law. The respect for law and duty must be the motivation of every action, and not happiness, but the two do not exclude the possibility of future happiness. The moral law is holly and unbreakable and every reasonable being has an almost holly dignity. This is why the other people must never be used as *means to an end*, but considered to be a *purpose* themselves. All people are subjects of the same moral law. In addition to these ideas, we must also mention Kant's interest for European peace and his social projects (Stere, 1998). According to this perspective, ethical communication excludes all kind of communication that tries to use or bend the auditorium's will to one's own will, as the auditorium is not a means to a goal. Also, communication should be in favor of peace and social prosperity, not of war and conflict.

The Utilitarian Ethic's most famous author is Mill. He developed his philosophy with significant

differences from Kant's philosophy. According to Mill, man seeks only happiness and whatever can contribute to procuring happiness. Every action must be judged by the measure to which it contributes to happiness. This is the principle of utility: *Actions are right as far as they tend to promote happiness; greatest happiness to the greatest number of people.* The sphere of pure egoism can be overcome by the concept of a superior utility, that of society. There are several degrees of happiness/ pleasure and head to the list are *superior pleasures* - those of the heart, such as altruism and devotion as sources of incomparable satisfactions for their carrier and for their subject. Here is where education and experience interfere, because social life is what moulds solidarity (Stere, 1998). Virtue is thus sought as a source of happiness. For all authors of utilitarian ethics, happiness is equivalent to well being, interest or pleasure. They sought measurable and quantifiable moral criteria, opposed to Kant's imperative. They were thus interested in the quantity of pleasure produced by an action to all those affected by it. The presence of pleasure and the absence of pain were the common ground to assess all actions. The utility principle requires to obey a psychological law, to act according to one's nature, in order to maximize one's pleasure and, as social evolved altruistic beings, for the pleasure of others. Acting selfishly is not acting morally. In order to take an ethical decision based on this principle, we may assess the consequences of one's actions, apply the normal code or act as we were ideal judges (Mureşan, 2013). When assessing a communication act, we must ask ourselves about its consequences upon society and the quantity of good resulting from that communication act.

The last, but not least topic on our list is Rawls' Justice Ethics. For Rawls, justice means *fairness*, and the main principle could be summed up as putting oneself in the original position of regarding the world through the *veil of ignorance*, which prevents us from being biased when arbitrating. In principle, this would prevent discrimination of gender, sex, race. Institutions should not disfavor anyone based on those criteria. Of course, there are sometimes nuances that one must take into account, sometimes it is not in fairness' best interest to ignore one's particularities. Preventing discrimination and being fair

sometimes requires taking into account such particularities. This is why women giving birth have the right to more days off work, for instance. When communicating, we must be sensitive to cultural particularities or other factors that relate both to the receiver as well as to the topic of our communication act. However, ethical communication must take into account the advice of being fair at least as to the intentions of the act are concerned.

In public relations, all public of an organization must be treated equally and fairly by that organization while, in journalistic communication, there should be a great concern not to discriminate when reporting news. In Europe, the last decades have known a large migration of people and, although migration has had positive consequences, in some parts intolerance, xenophobia and racism are rising, undermining multiculturalism. Journalists, as guarantors of multicultural democracy, must contribute to the increase of public awareness and decrease of ignorance, and not, as it happened in some cases, increase intolerance and racism. When the news agenda is full of discriminatory articles, it increases racism. There is a big need for the journalist to give balanced and informed accounts of the facts. A journalist may do so by checking a diversity list before publishing his paper; on that list, the points to be checked are recommended by Aidan White, as mentioned below. We add to that list the imperative that, in a multicultural democracy, all minorities have the right to media representation.

Diversity Checklist

What are my own personal assumptions about the people I am reporting on?

Am I open to accepting ideas for stories that go beyond my own cultural standpoint?

Have I any prejudicial attitude to the issue at the heart of story I am covering?

If I mention colour, ethnicity or physical appearance is it strictly relevant?

Am I using the correct terms to describe people or their culture?

Have I talked with experienced colleagues or people from different backgrounds about the story?

Have I used a variety of opinions and sources including from minority groups?

Is there a dominant discourse? Have I questioned this approach?

Have I ensured that my work does not reflect stereotypes?

Am I sensitive to the needs of the people involved directly in the work?

Have I considered the impact of the story or the images on the lives of others? (White, 2008).

The ideal of fairness and objectivity or impartiality is what journalists should aspire to. The term *objectivity* may be a relic of scientism, but it indicates the struggle for fairness and impartiality, which recommends that journalists have the duty of being honest. There are rules to follow for the reporter to be closer to objectivity, such as the account for the verifiable facts of an event, presenting all sides of the story, in an impartial manner (without expressing his beliefs in the account), while always asking themselves whether their account corresponds to the way things are (Sanders, 2003). However, the simple account of facts can lead to manipulation, like it did in the First World and afterwards, when it became clear that the facts could actually be manipulated in order to transmit whatever meaning was wanted. So the public, in addition to the facts, needs a proper interpretation of the facts, a structure of the fact in order to present "a representative image of the world" (Iggers, 1999).

In conclusion, ethical communication is not only a social necessity, but it is also the only way to communicate in professions such as Journalism and Public Relations, on which the welfare of society depends. As professions, their communication can be nothing but ethical, and by ethical we understand, on one hand, applying the ethical principles of theoretical ethics in order to obtain a moral behavior which leads to personal and professional accomplishments, as well as to that of the public and, on the other hand, applying the norms specified by deontological codes. If broken, we may no longer talk of a professional in those cases, since professional conduct always involves a moral component. The moral conduct in these two professions has as a result moral happiness for both the professional and the society he lives in.

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