

Seeking Morality in Media

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Abstract: In this paper, the focus will be on a general framework of morality which media morality is based on. Media morality is related to everyone that is under the influence of media. The world is a global village which we conceive through media, and everywhere the media reaches is its domain. In this respect, media is vital. Considering the place and importance it has on our lives, the following questions need to be addressed: What are the ethical codes of media? Is media morality just professional ethics? Has media a vicious and devastating influence and if any, could we be protected from these influences by "intellectual self-defense"? The article will touch upon these questions and then will suggest that "media could be restrained not by directives, standards and principles as an external morality, but by internal codes". The person who is involved in media can establish this internal control within himself. To be able to do this, we should stress our own morality sphere as well as media morality sphere, for moral action depends ultimately upon the free and principled decision of an individual and is based on conscience in this sense.

Key Words: Media, Morality, Ethics, Communication Ethics, Self-Defense Consciousness, Mc Luhan.

Media ethics is related to the type of professional ethics employees in the sector have, and it constitutes the source of the general principles of the profession (For media ethics in terms of media industry, audience and content, see Çaplı, 2002: 18.). However, it goes beyond the boundaries of professional ethics and covers the entire domain of media, which is the whole world. In this sense, everyone associated with media, is also connected to media ethics. Therefore, understanding the form of existence and some moral issues this existence raises is essential for media ethics.

In fact, science ethics, sports ethics, bio-ethics, and media ethics are not separate ethics that are independent of each other. These and other simi-

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lar ethics are various definitions of ethics with a variety of applications depending on the characteristics of the aforementioned areas. In that respect, media ethics should be based on general morality (Soykan, 1998:197). The expression of general morality in this context will be the general framework of morality, as an umbrella concept that covers all the different manifestations of morality, rather than public morality that represents the moral standards of a society.

Morality is a multiple meaning term and corresponds to *moral* in Latin, and *ethik* in Greek. Both morals and ethics have similar etymology as morality. *Ethics* is derived from *ethos*, which means character and habit. In this sense, Aristotle qualifies ethics as a science of character (Aristotle, 1998:1103, b.27). Similarly the Latin word *moral* is derived from *mos* (plural *mores*) which means customs, habits and character (Sahakian, 1974: 6).

Morality can be defined as a set of beliefs and patterns that dominate the conscious life of an individual, a people, and a social class, or an era (Delius, 1990: 312). Thus, historical and cultural differences create different moral experiences in the world. For this reason, the discussion of media morality or ethics will take place within the framework of general morality, in other words, the ethical framework that covers all these different moral phenomena.

Morality is what we experience, ethics is what we theorize (Poyraz, 2008: 16). According to this definition, media morality could be summarized as media's self-realization ethics, codes of ethics and passwords corresponding to these codes.

Etymologically, media means medium, means, mediator, and vehicle. Kılıçbay points out the difference between means and agent (Kılıçbay, 1993:18). Media is a means if it transmits a message. But if media is an agent of a political organization or a corporation, there is a neglect of an ethical principle and a moral issue. This fact applies to all kinds of media (see Chomsky, 1993).

Viewers perceive media organs as a complete sentence. There is a grammar of the whole publication, and this sentence should be syntactically coherent and consistent with its constituent elements. If any element of the sentence is inaccurate, the whole sentence is perceived to be inaccurate. Viewers tend to find a film unrealistic as a whole if the film has an unrealistic element (Arslan, 1993: 35-7).

Centuries before Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, the Chinese knew and used printing techniques. In fact, during the T'ang dynasty (618-

917), they published an official newspaper titled *Ti pao* (Jeanneney, 1998: 24). Just like the Chinese entertainment tool, gunpowder having turned into an explosive centuries after its invention, printing press, as a means of disseminating information to a wide audience, has become even a more effective tool in the hands of those who own it. For this reason, media that make up the cornerstones of the history of public opinion have become a vehicle of power and authority. Marshall McLuhan's expression of "world as a global village" in his *Understanding Media* is quite significant in this regard (McLuhan, 1994:93).. The values and the vehicle of transmitting these values of this global village is media, and in McLuhan's words, the message is the vehicle itself. That is, it is not the content, but techniques, or rather the medium itself that is important. Due to the extensions of these technologies, our senses of touching and hearing have largely been lost, and reduced to the sense of vision in an unprecedented way (Avcı, 1990: 178).

Global Village is the name of McLuhan Marshall's last book (McLuhan; Povers, 2001: 20). Media guru Marshall McLuhan also said something equally important: "Medium is the message." He means, the medium where the message is transferred, is a message itself. With the change of one letter, the word "message" is converted into "massage", which is the title of another McLuhan book: *The Medium is the Massage* (McLuhan, Quentin, Jerome, 1967 [2005]). In the title, there is a pun with the words *message*, *massage*, *mass* and *age* (massage: mass-age)

The main function of the media is to communicate information to people, and it is also the medium that enables this communication. In this regard, media, which "is the entire communication domain in which audio-visual elements are used separately or together" (Soykan, 1998: 206), provides a one-way communication. The direction goes from the encoder and/or sender to the recipient. In fact, we cannot talk about communication here. This one-sidedness of communication also requires that media morality be addressed in terms of senders. (Soykan, 1998: 206).

The power media exercise on us through information, which is called media-cracy, is based on such an epistemic foundation. This term, which is also the title of Thomas Meyer's work *Mediokratie Die Kolonisierung der Politik durch die Medien* (Media Democracy: How the Media Colonize Politics (2001), refers to the colonization of politics by the media. (See Meyer, 2004; Poyraz, 1994: 21; Poyraz, 2006: 4-5). The mass does not have much resistance to it. On one occasion, as Chomsky put it, unless individuals develop an intel-

lectual self-defense in order to lay the foundations of a more meaningful democracy, they cannot protect themselves from manipulation and the control of media (Chomsky, 1993: 10–3).

It seems that in order to promote awareness of intellectual self-defense, we should place emphasis on individual moral values, rather than enforcing ethical standards and guidelines. In this sense, media is like a Daedalus' statue on its own. Daedalus is a mythological figure who is known for his statues that can move and also the wings he created to help his son Icarus fly. Daedalus was also said to have poured mercury into a wooden statue of Aphrodite which gave her the ability to move, and then tied her to a pole so she would not move away from the pedestal (Capelle, 1994: 175). The legal framework, standards, and principles constitute the pole the media is tied to. However, tied down media cannot be free. It should be regulated with an internal code and this internal code will actually be the self-control over the individual who is involved with media. This should be the awareness of intellectual self-defense that Chomsky has pointed out.

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