

ÉTICA DE LOS MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN
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In a world where post-truth has been declared word of the year by the Oxford Dictionary after Donald Trump's surprising triumph in the race for the presidency of the United States of America, and the British referendum that resulted in the exit of Great Britain from the European Union (Brexit), the book *Ética de los medios de comunicación*, by the Chilean philosophy doctor and journalist María Javiera Aguirre Romero, proves with no doubt to be relevant. The text not only addresses this question, but also does so from a realistic and intentionally "applied" perspective to the contexts and considering the main actors that act on them.

In her work, Aguirre Romero proposes a journey through history and the philosophical foundations that justify the role of the media in democratic societies, through a diagnosis at present and the challenges they must face, in order to propose a macroethics of solidarity-based shared responsibility, as a solution to the deontological problems that the sector is experiencing today.

The book is part of the collection *Éticas Aplicadas*, supervised by Francesc Torralba, and it is based on the doctoral thesis developed by the author in the framework of her studies at the University of Barcelona.

To develop her argument, the author organizes her speech in four large sections and an epilogue with which she gradually builds the pillars of her proposal. In the first chapter, "Origin and Foundation of the Social Function of the Media", Aguirre presents a liberal genealogy of the press with a special emphasis on the moral categories on which it was based at the time of its emergence (19th century), as well as its reinterpretation at present. The concepts of freedom, democracy, truth and responsibility are the cornerstones of her argument.

In the second section, "The role of the media in today's democracies", the author resorts to the proposal of the communicative action of J. Habermas (2001), to defend a concept of truth applied and agreed through dialogue and argumentation. She also appeals to the ethics of responsibility of K. O. Apel (1992), to highlight the idea of the macroethics of solidarity-based shared responsibility that is later addressed in her proposal.

In the third part of the book, "Ethical levels as a guarantee of quality journalism", Aguirre Romero develops the main ethical issues that affect the press today through three levels: the journalist, the media company

and the professional sector. Following this structure, she reflects – among other things – on the motivation of those who choose to dedicate themselves professionally to journalism, the relationship between them and the media in which they work, the role of the press as a source of public opinion, conflicts of interest of the media company, as well as the imperatives of its social responsibility.

The fourth chapter of the book, “The digital revolution and the media”, analyses the contemporary context in which journalism is carried out, in which digitalisation poses four main challenges: citizen journalism, the power of common citizens and the case of social movements, the regulation of digital conversation and the digitalization of others. Through these challenges, the author reflects on the responsibility in the symbolic production, retakes the debate about who is a journalist, criticizes the dehumanization and the moral distance that this entails and raises the need for a new ethics for the mass media.

Finally, in the Epilogue, the author synthesizes the content of the text and delves into an ethical proposal for the media based on the demand for responsibility at three levels: the journalist, the media company and the professional sector. In particular, it proposes a macroethics of solidarity-based shared responsibility in which these different actors are able to build consensus through dialogue, in order to face the ethical questions posed by the practice of the profession. This dialogue, says Aguirre, must go hand in hand with a normative framework that guarantees the proper practice of the profession, placing at the centre the right of people to information.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Aguirre Romero’s work stands out for the clarity with which she sets out her arguments. Some of them, as for instance J. Habermas’s proposal, are generally quite dense for those who are not familiar with the author. Also, the structure of the text is very appropriate as it guides the reader through the different pathways in which the author bases her proposal.

Going deeper into the content, we find Aguirre Romero’s proposal very appropriate and it recovers the theory of the stakeholders in relation to the commitment of the accountability, as a key to guarantee the good practice of journalism in the three levels mentioned above. The diagram of the

media stakeholders is particularly interesting, in which people's right to information is placed at the centre. Around this right, the author situates the different actors that are related to the information task, organized in two degrees or levels of influence: the first one is occupied by the government, the civil society, the advertisers, and the media itself (property), along with the journalists and other related workers. In the second level we find universities, NGOs, the local community, political parties, professional associations, trade unions, suppliers, other media and other companies.

The mere identification of these actors is a relevant contribution, as it distributes the responsibility of the ethical exercise of journalism beyond the professionals themselves – as individuals – to place it in a network of social agents that undoubtedly have an important role to play to guarantee the right to information. However, this same distribution raises the question of whether in reality, in a given context, these actors would agree to prioritize people's right to Information, ahead of their other interests (mainly political and economic), assuming that each of them has its own network of interest groups, which contribute and sometimes demand and pressure for the prioritization of other values. The authors also examines whether a media company can be a profitable business and at the same time respond satisfactorily to the mandate to guarantee people's right to information (p.92).

The question becomes even more appropriate if we consider that an important part of the media today not only offer information services, but also entertainment (such as television and radio, for example). Thus, their objectives are diversified and they also focus on conquering certain niche markets for profit.

Just as in the media the objective of guaranteeing people's right to information goes hand in hand with the economic and political interests of the media, other social actors must also combine the guarantee of this right with other institutional goals. It is, therefore, a double debate: one internal, regarding the priorities of each of the actors; and an external one among the various actors in order to build agreements that allow them to respond adequately to the common interest (in this case, guarantee the right to information) as well as their institutional interests and commitments.

The dialogical perspective, which the author collects from J. Habermas (2001), is an excellent tool to solve this question in democratic societies. However, this entails a high level of complexity, since not only the arguments of the parties are involved in the dialogue but also their values, priorities, wills, and claims, among other elements. According to the latter

and following M. Foucault (2002), it should be noted that the power relations between these actors are not necessarily symmetrical, but rather the opposite, making the conditions of this dialogue even more challenging.

In view of this complexity, the author proposes –quite adequately– two complementary tools to manage it: (1) the macroethics of solidarity-based shared responsibility and (2) a normative framework (a law) to safeguard it. Thus, the responsibility for the proper practice of journalistic work is distributed among all the actors involved, and therefore it becomes a social responsibility in which –in one way or another– every person has a role to play.

Under the scenario drawn by the author, the post-truth that we discussed at the beginning would not make any sense, since there would be many voices that would put it on the table and the common public would not give it any credit or would not be fooled by their *siren song*.

In short, *Ética de los medios de comunicación* is a highly recommended work for students and professionals of social communication, as well as for anyone interested in defending universal rights and building mature and responsible democracies. It is indeed a very useful text not only to open the debate, but also to examine in greater depth an increasingly necessary reflection and to glimpse some possible ways to solve the challenge of journalistic ethics today.

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