## NC Shell – SHORT ENOUGH

#### I negate.

### Observation 1

#### The resolution is asking us to consider how a free press ought to act in a democracy, which entails that the standard for this round should be preserving democratic values. Therefore, the value criterion should be upholding a form of deliberative democracy which best allows for inclusive, civil, and productive democratic debate.

### Observation 2

#### Munoz-Torres defines what it means to prioritize objectivity in journalism in 2012:

[Juan Ramón Muñoz-Torres, “TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY IN JOURNALISM”, Journalism Studies, 13:4, 566-582, 2012. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2012.662401] CT

Common Notions in the Main Definitions of Objectivity

No matter the complexity of the concept of objectivity and its changes, there are always recurrent notions embedded in it. Since a full review of them would divert us from the main aims of this study, I will now try to summarize these ideas sorted in two main categories, in order to clarify the meaning of the term ‘‘objectivity’’.

If there is an idea shared by most definitions of objectivity, it is the idea of value-free facticity, which must rule journalistic reporting. This has given origin to the first category. As Hackett puts it,

the ideal of objectivity suggests that facts can be separated from opinion or value judgements, and that journalists can stand apart from the real-world events whose truth or meaning they transfer to the news audience by means of neutral language and competent reporting techniques. (1984, p. 232)

Consequently, ‘‘the intrusion of value into a recitation of facts threatens objectivity, and a reporter with strongly held values threatens the smooth operation of the system’’ (Reese, 1990, pp. 3934).

Along the same line, the concept of objectivity is usually defined as the opposite of bias:

Most definitions in common language regard news bias as the intrusion of subjective ‘‘opinion’’ by the reporter or news organization, into what is purportedly a ‘‘factual’’ account. Thus MacLean (1981, p. 56) suggests that ‘‘When a story does not distinguish clearly between its author’’s interpretations and the facts being reported, it is a biased or slanted report.’’ (Hackett, 1984, p. 230)

Hence, this idea that journalists must ‘‘keep themselves aside’’, neutral, when ‘‘relaying the facts’’, refraining themselves from interfering with their values and opinions in the reporting tasks is unavoidably present, in one way or another, when objectivity is discussed.

### Contention 1: Objectivity is impossible and leads to cynicism and moral relativism.

#### Objectivity and relativism are two sides of the same coin. By presenting all sides of an issue as potentially valid, “objective” journalism sends the message that there is no real truth.

Muñoz-Torres 12 [Juan Ramón Muñoz-Torres, “TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY IN JOURNALISM”, Journalism Studies, 13:4, 566-582, 2012. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2012.662401] CT

A Pendulous Motion from Objectivity: Relativism

Once the positivistic framework is rooted in our minds, one can expect, from the rejection of objectivity, a pendulous motion towards its apparent opposite, subjectivity. This is exactly what has happened in the professional practice of journalism and especially in the reflection upon media. As mentioned in the Introduction, during the last decades, the philosophical underpinnings of objectivity have been reassessed and ultimately rejected (Durham, 1998, p. 117). This dismissal of objectivity has given way, as a reaction, to the birth of many theories and trends of thought that have placed all the emphasis in subjectivity (an account of the main ones, in Ryan, 2001).

As Ryan remarks, ‘‘journalism has not escaped the influence of the relativists (e.g. Altheide, 1976; Harding, 1991; Longino, 1990; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991), who argue that absolutes do not exist in knowledge, morals, or values’’ (Ryan, 2001, p. 6). Relativism has flourished indeed, not only in the media field, but in most domains of Academia. Its most basic principle\*that the standards of evaluation of truth and rationality are relative to the subjective individual values and ideas, and, consequently, every belief is as good as every other\*is more than familiar to all of us, because it is implicitly or explicitly held everywhere.

Focusing now on media, relativism has been partly taking the place of objectivity theory in many ways, as the latter has been declining. Although it is not the central point of this paper and would merit a lot more attention, I will now offer a brief reflection on the principle of balance, already explained. This is also related to objectivist presumptions, inasmuch as it demands that journalists refrain from favouring one of the competing accounts over the others about a contested matter. But this time the emphasis is placed upon the equal value given to all opinions and value-judgements. As Durham fittingly notes: ‘‘Journalism has embraced this kind of relativism as an integral part of its practice, as reporters are trained to seek out oppositional views on a given issue as actual evidence of objectivity in reporting’’ (1998, p. 124).

It seems to me quite clear that offering pluralistic views about a topic can be enriching and valuable, especially if there is not enough evidence available or it is just a matter of mere preference. Nevertheless, it is also true that the principle of ever presenting opposing views as equally valid amounts to stating implicitly that all opinions possess the same value as truth-claims. This works against the evidence: we can all distinguish between some crazy, arbitrary opinions, not grounded on sound evidence or sensible reasoning, and those based on cogent reasoning or on irrefutable experience. Furthermore, if all opinions were equally valid, then none of them would be, in the end, valid at all, or in other words, they all would be alien to truth, as relativism holds.

Expressed by means of an example, Harding asks: ‘‘What would it mean to assert that no reasonable standards can or could in principle be found for adjudicating between one culture’s claim that the earth is flat and another culture’s claim that the earth is round?’’ (1991, p. 139, as quoted by Durham, 1998, p. 126). Taken from journalistic practice, Rosen provides another very illustrative example:

On the one hand the Tobacco Institute says smoking is fine and actually improves your health, but on the other hand the American Cancer Society says smoking will kill you . . . Journalism shows us that often balance is a flight from truth rather than an avenue into truth. (1993, p. 49)

Something similar can be said about topics about which moral values stand out in a more obvious way. It is ridiculous to suggest that there can be a neutral stand on, say, poverty, racism, terrorism, abortion, drug dealing, etc.

Objectivism and Relativism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?

After this quick review of relativism in journalism, we can now try to establish some connections with the previous line of reasoning. Giving due consideration to relativism, we can easily conclude that, far from being at odds with objectivism, as it seems prima facie, it is closely connected with it. The reason is quite clear: objectivism and relativism are usually linked as two sides of the same coin, because both of them are part of the positivistic conceptual framework.

Borrowing Putnam’s way of explaining this, we are too positivistic with regard to some issues, like physics, because we see it ‘‘as the One True Theory, and not simply as a rationally acceptable description suited for certain problems and purposes’’ (1981, p. 143). Thus, taking empirical evidence as the ultimate truth criterion, makes us ‘‘subjectivistic about descriptions we cannot ‘reduce’ to physics’’. Therefore, my conclusion is that, if we would become less positivistic about physics, then we might also become less relativistic about other matters, like ethics or daily life affairs.

If we now confront the relationship between objectivism and relativism to truth\* the essential trait of knowledge\*we will find clear similarities in both cases. Objectivism equates truth with the object known, understood as a set of ‘‘facts’’, in an impossible attempt to get rid of the subject. Relativism, on its part, makes the opposite move, trying to ‘‘reduce’’ truth to a mere subjective perception, in a vain effort to make reality dependent, in a way or another, on individual or collective subjectivity.

If positivists were logically coherent, they should acknowledge that objectivity as the main criterion to assess the validity of our knowledge is inherently flawed (as shown in the preceding sections). Moreover, positivism not only cannot prove any of its basic assumptions, but\*what is worse\*it also falls into contradiction, when asserting that experience is the only valid source for knowledge (because, as we have seen, this tenet is far from being factual and cannot be proved at all by experience). Besides, it severely damages the very concept of knowledge, by trying to ‘‘reduce’’ it to its object, while neglecting its subject. Something similar could be said about relativism, when holding that every individual or group provide criteria for what is true or false. If this were so, then we could decide if this very premise is true or false, which makes the claim self-refuting, something devastating for any doctrine.

In sum, both positivism and relativism end up arriving at the same dead end, namely the denial of the very concept of truth, at least in the sense in which it was mainly understood for many centuries, from Aristotle to Bacon and later. This is the direct consequence of having rejected what once was evidence about knowledge and of having posed ill-conceived questions about it. But, probably, and worst of all, by so doing, positivism has set a conceptual framework in which our minds seem to be trapped for at least the last two centuries. In other words, having once accepted the basic positivistic presumptions, it becomes very difficult to escape from this dualistic view of knowledge. This furnishes the answer to the question posed at the beginning of this article about why objectivity in journalism has become an inconclusive and aporetic debate, which swings from one end of the subjectobject dichotomy to the other.

#### The relativism embraced by “objective” journalism erodes civic ethics and the moral guardrails that make democracy possible.

Parks 20 [Perry Parks (Assistant Professor of Journalism at Michigan State University),“Toward a humanistic turn for a more ethical journalism,” Journalism (London, England), 2020-09, Vol.21 (9), p.1229-1245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919894778] CT

Let us look again at the chilling amorality at the heart of detached, social scientific, ‘objective’ political analysis in US public affairs reporting. Consider the meaning of ‘hard choices’ in this Washington Post story headlined ‘Trump administration seeks GOP support on border wall as senators confront hard choices’ (Kim and Werner, 2019). Does ‘choices’ refer to how members of the US Senate will wield their extraordinary power to either protect and assist or hinder and persecute the desperate and vulnerable migrants who arrive at the US border with Mexico? No. The story, rather, addresses senators’ personal political fortunes:

[M]any GOP senators weighing a vote on nullifying Trump’s national emergency are being confronted with a difficult choice: Buck their president and potentially draw the wrath of core Republican voters, or support Trump’s controversial declaration for a wall that remains unpopular with the broader public.

The potential consequences are more acute for GOP senators up for reelection next year, particularly those in Democratic-leaning or swing states who may need to create some distance from Trump yet could invite political challenges from the right should they vote for a disapproval resolution. (Kim and Werner, 2019)

Lip service is paid deep in the story to abstract moralistic concepts related to the actual situation at the border, with comments about a ‘humanitarian crisis’ and a call from a conservative advocacy group to ‘do the right thing’ for border security, but these ideas are not contested or developed. Questions of how senators could actually address humanitarian concerns or what ‘the right thing’ to do for migrants and concerned American citizens might be are not pertinent to the story.

Even many stories that purport to focus on questions of right and wrong, or the moral consequences of political actions for average people, revert quickly to formulaic tit-for-tat commentary and rhetorical gamesmanship rather than material repercussions of policy. When reporting on the ‘outrage’ of gun-control activists, for instance, the Washington Post (Thebault, 2019) seized not on the outrageous scale of gun-related carnage in the United States and the day-to-day psychological impact on public school students for whom hushed lockdown drills and sheltering in place are a shamefully traumatic routine. Sticking with the savvy political science frame, the Post focused on symbolic activity in a state legislative hearing room in its story ‘GOP lawmakers wore pearls while gun violence victims testified. Activists were outraged’. The headline pretty much tells the story, which originated from New Hampshire when an activist testifying for gun-control legislation posted photos of three (male) lawmakers wearing pearl necklaces:

The implication was clear, they [the activists] said: These politicians thought gun-control activists were ‘clutching their pearls’ in overwrought and self-righteous outrage – and, specifically, female outrage. (Thebault, 2019)

‘Objectively’ seeking the other side, the reporter, who could not get comment from the lawmakers themselves, includes a contorted rebuttal from a New Hampshire women’s gun-rights organization, suggesting that the pearls were worn not to mock gun-control advocates but to symbolically support women’s right to bear arms. The story then reproduces a series of obligatory social media condemnations from state and national politicians – a string of rhetorical pearl clutches that leaves the underlying moral issue of gun violence safely unexamined.

On the rare occasions when journalistic stories are framed as legitimate and nuanced questions of civic ethics, rather than as presumptive cases of pure instrumentalism, interesting things happen. Instead of ginning up automatic outrage or vindication, the reader is invited to question her assumptions and work through complex issues. For instance, a New York Times story (Paton and Zarate, 2019) about prisoners working for private companies is presented in terms of ethical ambiguity, with its subhead asking: ‘Brands are using prison labor to provide inmates with jobs and training. But is it possible – and ethical – to build a profitable fashion business behind bars?’ The story raises questions of exploitation and power imbalances but also explores opportunities for empowerment and meaningful work. Ultimately, the story, focusing on a single business working with women prisoners in Peru, tests a model for balancing prisoners’ rights and aspirations against capitalist demands.

In another example, a story in The New Yorker magazine about the ethical implications of indulging the fantasies of dementia patients invites an ambiguous response (MacFarquhar, 2018). The reader is first introduced to an assisted living community in which the hallways are decked out as porch fronts with street lamps, evoking the childhood neighborhoods of many residents. We witness acts of benevolent deception, as residents’ confusions are affirmed rather than corrected – they are escorted, for instance, to an imagined bus stop to wait for a ride ‘home’. The reader is guided for a time to view this approach as compassionate and clever in contrast with methods of repeatedly reminding people of their contextual truths: This isn’t your home, it’s not Sunday, your wife is dead. But the story then complicates the issue, raising important philosophical questions about preserving a dementia sufferer’s dignity, about whether someone with a choice would consent to permanent deception at the end of her life. Among the experts cited is philosopher and ethicist Sissela Bok:

It is easy to imagine a white lie as a kindness that does no harm, Bok believes, but most lies do harm to someone. Lying resembles violence, she says, because it can coerce people to act against their will. Even lying for benevolent reasons risks a coercive kind of paternalism, and can be corrupting, like any other unchecked exercise of power. (MacFarquhar, 2018)

These are thorny issues, left unresolved in the story, which means that they must be contemplated by the reader. Imagine if routine coverage of Donald Trump’s dishonesty dwelled in this realm of moral consequence, rather than on fact-checking questions targeting degrees of literal truth or falsity (see Cloud, 2018), or sociological reviews of who believes him and why, or political analysis of the electoral implications of enabling or combatting him.

Unfortunately, dominant journalistic ethos renders such questions in the political realm difficult to ask. Writing of the indirect methods investigative journalists rely on to summon citizen outrage without expressing any themselves, Glasser and Ettema (1989) note that ‘the ability of journalists to speak explicitly and forcefully of values is severely constrained’ (p. 14). Investigative reporters ‘are called upon not so much to maintain as to produce standards of moral judgment, but they are denied by the canons of objectivity the opportunity to explicitly make and, more important, analyze and defend such judgments’ (p. 3). Faced with this proscription, which Glasser and Ettema describe as ‘the paradox of the disengaged conscience’ (p. 3), reporters draw on several strategies to demonstrate that ‘transgressions are, in fact, transgressions’ (p. 2). Among these strategies is to focus on misconduct that violates the law, a bright line of codified behavioral limits that serves as ‘the most concrete and objective standard for the evaluation of questionable actions’ (p. 10) and releases journalists from promoting their own value judgments. This strategy helps explain the sudden journalistic distancing from links between the Trump administration and Russian election manipulators after Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s investigative report did not explicitly state that Trump had violated the law. While the report did not negate the numerous documented connections between Trump’s people and Russian manipulators, it undermined the legal ‘objective standard’ for misconduct and rendered reporters newly vulnerable to claims of bias if they asserted these connections.

Another strategy journalists use to highlight moral transgressions without implicating themselves in moral judgment is to fall back on social scientism. Glasser and Ettema (1989) note that, for Boston Globe reporters exposing pervasive racism in the city, ‘statistical comparisons provided another of the “rocks” to which they could cling in their assessment’ (p. 13). The quantitative measure – ‘turn[ing] moral claims into empirical claims’ (p. 13) – once again distances journalists from any qualitative responsibility in calling out immoral behavior.

Finally, investigative journalists seek to validate their reporting of transgressions by presenting factual accounts that, through their detailed depictions of transgressive behavior, appeal indirectly to people’s sense of common decency (Glasser and Ettema, 1989). That is, without asserting any judgment of their own, journalists report behavior they believe to be, on its face, transparently immoral, then step back to allow community members to fill the judgmental vacuum. This is a plausible reading of what the New York Times reporters were attempting in the story at the top of this article, recounting in exquisite detail how Trump mocked Christine Blasey Ford (Haberman and Baker, 2018). Such efforts are not devoid of emotional description – Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) has documented ‘a strategic ritual of emotionality’ in Pulitzer Prize-winning stories, and Haberman and Baker used affective images such as Trump’s voice ‘dripping with derision’. But the emotions deployed are not the journalists’, and their incorporation can be read as assuming a moral transgression without asserting one. Even more than investigative reporters, daily political journalists are expected to remain neutral about moral affairs (Glasser and Ettema, 1989).

By leaving moral judgment purely up to community response, journalists risk reinforcing or accelerating moral transgressions that do not widely resonate. Because journalists do not invest any moral stake in such issues themselves, ‘[W]hen stories do not summon outrage, journalism needs only to fall silent’ (Glasser and Ettema, 1989: 18) – a diagnosis that helps to explain the widespread normalization of Trump’s extraordinary rhetoric in the news media (Parks, 2019b). Ultimately,

[W]hile investigative journalism may function to conserve or to change the moral order, journalistic traditions and practices also function to undermine the rationality of that order by subverting critical discussion of it. The impoverishment of journalism’s moral resources may well equip it to preside most comfortably over the debasement and dissolution of values, more comfortably, certainly, than over their definition and development. (Glasser and Ettema, 1989: 17–18)

#### This author continues:

Parks 20 [Perry Parks (Assistant Professor of Journalism at Michigan State University),“Toward a humanistic turn for a more ethical journalism,” Journalism (London, England), 2020-09, Vol.21 (9), p.1229-1245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919894778] CT

We know that journalism and journalists are on the outs in the popular imagination (Willnat et al., 2019), even as journalistic savvy intensifies and journalistic methods for data gathering and interpretation grow increasingly sophistvaicated in tandem with social scientific polling (Barnhurst, 2015) and database tools. Only about a third of Americans say they can trust most news most of the time, and the global aggregate stands at about 44 percent (Newman et al., 2018). Counterintuitively, even as news media fact-checking activities become more prominent (Cloud, 2018) and journalists rely heavily on officially produced data sets (Fink and Anderson, 2015), roughly two-thirds of American respondents cited accuracy as a reason for their distrust in news, and three-fourths mentioned some form of bias (Knight Foundation, 2018). In other words, herculean efforts by mainstream news organizations to demonstrate their ethical commitments to factual precision and ideological neutrality are either impotent or producing the opposite of their intended effects (Barnhurst, 2015). Approaches that would appear to directly address the gap between the press and its publics seem rather to exacerbate them.

In this essay, I argue that an epistemological embrace of positivistic scientism or naïve empiricism (Mindich, 1998) to the exclusion of humanistic orientations keeps journalists from building trusting relationships with their publics. Privileging facticity over conscientious storytelling distracts and detaches audiences from the true stakes and implications of public issues, and privileging instrumental rather than moral framing of public affairs promotes cynicism and creates a vacuum filled by ideology and motivated reasoning. Both of these impediments stem from Western journalism’s nearly exclusive commitment to detached and rational scientism, a phenomenon that took root in the 20th century (Glasser and Ettema, 1989: 5) and is only accelerating in the big data era of today. The ‘scientization of journalism’ is a ‘shift to an attitude of detached realism [that] places the ends and values of political life outside the normal bounds of political communication’ (Hallin, 1985: 139). Its tenets lead to ‘a separation of the reporter’s views from the views being presented – a separation that is so rigid that it is the equivalent of erasure’ (Durham, 1998: 119).

### Contention 2: Journalists should prioritize moral clarity.

#### Instead of prioritizing the impossible goal of objectivity, a free press should speak with moral clarity and forcefully advocate for the truth.

Lowrey 20 [Wesley Lowery (Pulitzer Prize winning Journalist), “A Reckoning Over Objectivity, Led by Black Journalists,” The New York Times. June 23, 2020. <https://courses.washington.edu/smithint/lowery.pdf>] CT

For years, I’ve been among a chorus of mainstream journalists who have called for our industry to abandon the appearance of objectivity as the aspirational journalistic standard, and for reporters instead to focus on being fair and telling the truth, as best as one can, based on the given context and available facts. It’s not a novel argument. Scores of journalists across generations, from gonzo reporters like Hunter S. Thompson to more traditional voices like Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, have advocated this very approach. Mr. Kovach and Mr. Rosenstiel lay it out in detail in their classic text “The Elements of Journalism.” Those of us advancing this argument know that a fairness-and-truth focus will have different, healthy interpretations. We also know that neutral “objective journalism” is constructed atop a pyramid of subjective decision-making: which stories to cover, how intensely to cover those stories, which sources to seek out and include, which pieces of information are highlighted and which are downplayed. No journalistic process is objective. And no individual journalist is objective, because no human being is. And so, instead of promising our readers that we will never, on any platform, betray a single personal bias — submitting ourselves to a life sentence of public thoughtlessness — a better pledge would be an assurance that we will devote ourselves to accuracy, that we will diligently seek out the perspectives of those with whom we personally may be inclined to disagree and that we will be just as sure to ask hard questions of those with whom we’re inclined to agree. The best of our profession already does this. But we need to be honest about the gulf that lies between the best and the bulk. It’s possible to build journalism self-aware enough to bridge that gap. But it will take moral clarity, which will require both editors and reporters to stop doing things like reflexively hiding behind euphemisms that obfuscate the truth, simply because we’ve always done it that way. Deference to precedent is a poor excuse for continuing to make decisions that potentially let powerful bad actors off the hook and harm the public we serve. Neutral objectivity trips over itself to find ways to avoid telling the truth. Neutral objectivity insists we use clunky euphemisms like “officer-involved shooting.” Moral clarity, and a faithful adherence to grammar and syntax, would demand we use words that most precisely mean the thing we’re trying to communicate: “the police shot someone.” In coverage of policing, adherents to the neutral objectivity model create journalism so deferential to the police that entire articles are rendered meaningless. True fairness would, in fact, go as far as requiring that editors seriously consider not publishing any significant account of a police shooting until the staff has tracked down the perspective — the “side” — of the person the police had shot. That way beat reporters aren’t left simply rewriting a law enforcement news release. Moral clarity would insist that politicians who traffic in racist stereotypes and tropes — however cleverly — be labeled such with clear language and unburied evidence. Racism, as we know, is not about what lies in the depths of a human’s heart. It is about word and deed. And a more aggressive commitment to truth from the press would empower our industry to finally admit that. The failures of neutral objective journalism across several beats in the news media are countless. And these shortcomings have real consequences for the readers we are sworn to serve — particularly black readers, who we know are more likely to have interactions with the criminal justice system (whose leaders we court), more likely to be the targets of white supremacists (whom we commonly indulge) and more likely to have lives made more difficult by racist politicians and implicitly racist policies that we repeatedly refuse to call out.

#### In a democracy a free press can’t remain neutral on issues of moral consequence. Instead, they are obligated to advocate on behalf democratic values.

Cohen-Almagor 08 [Raphael Cohen-Almagor (University of Hull), “The limits of objective reporting,” Journal of Language and Politics 7:1 (2008), 138–157] CT

The values of not harming others and respecting others need to occupy a prominent place in the considerations of journalists. These are basic ethical standards that sometimes require a normative attitude on the part of the media. Here I come to deal with moral neutrality, which is a further dimension usually associated with objectivity. I contest William Marimow’s assertion that moral values are not problematic for the investigative reporting and that “right and wrong may be a threshold question but not a fundamental question” (Glasser 1989: 7). Morality should be a factor in deciding whether to cover an event or not, and if it is decided to cover the event, how it should be covered. When clearly immoral practices, such as racism, are at issue, morality is a pertinent and significant factor that prescribes partiality rather than neutrality. Media organisations do not necessarily have to give a platform to both sides of a given conflict. They do not need to play the role of a neutral observer when one side in a given dispute or conflict is clearly immoral.

That is to say that on such matters journalists, despite popular sentiment, do not stand outside the community they cover. The insistence that journalists’ identities and experiences can be made irrelevant, and that all good reporters leave their personalities at home before they cover any news story is flawed. Their identity as citizens in democracies does matter. Journalists are not forced to erase themselves from their stories and to distance themselves from their immoral subjects (Allan 2005: 300–301). The media may have an opinion, even a strong opinion, regarding a certain issue. For instance, when doing a follow-up of a rape story where clear evidence was produced during the trial to prove the convicted man’s guilt, the media do not and should not give equal footing to the girl who was raped and to the rapist who was found guilty by the court. They should not be impartial between the criminal and the victim (Stensaas 1986: 50–51; Frost 2000: 38).12 It is the duty of the media to be partial, to condemn the rape, and to say that the deed was repugnant. This is the only correct way of presenting the moral case in hand. Likewise, it would be unthinkable to invite Yigal Amir, the assassin of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and Leah Rabin, the Prime Minister’s widow, to share the same platform for debate in the name of ‘balancing’.

Several arguments may be advanced against moral neutrality when covering explicit immoral conduct, such as racism. The first is the argument from democracy. It holds that journalists are also citizens. They live within the democratic realm and owe democracy their allegiance. Free speech and free journalism exist because democracy makes them possible. They flourish in a liberal environment and they would become extinct in a coerced, anti-democratic society. Hence, journalists are obliged to sustain the environment that enables their liberties. Many do uphold and promote the basic values of democracy: not to harm others, and to respect others.

The second is the argument from paternalism. It is wrong to assume that all readers and spectators are able to differentiate between good and evil, and that all beings are rational. The media need to be responsible to those who are not fully rational, who are not able to discern between values and mischief. Here I refer first and foremost to children and youth. Violence and black-and-white slogans work better on the youth than on mature people. The media are not expected to simply transmit attractions without a warning. They need to be aware of the variety of people who receive their communications. The rejection of evil does not necessarily have to be made by the media personnel. The media could offer a platform for decision-makers and influential personalities to condemn detestable phenomena such as racism.

The third argument is from social responsibility (Rivers 1980: 43–50; Elliot 1986; Fink 1995: 309; Schudson 1995; Bunton 1998: 232–246). It is, of course, connected to the previous two arguments, but it has to do more with the shape and character of society that we wish to have. Jonathan Kaufman and his colleagues at the Boston Globe prepared a series attacking racial discrimination, not merely because it was illegal, but because they had decided that discrimination made a bad city, and they wanted Boston to be “the best city it could be” (Glasser 1989: 10).

In a similar vein, the BBC regards impartiality as involving not absolute neutrality or detachment from those basic moral or constitutional beliefs upon which the nation’s life rests. For instance, “the BBC does not feel obliged to be neutral as between truth and untruth, justice and injustice, freedom and slavery, compassion and cruelty, tolerance and intolerance” (Gibbons 1998: 107–108). Being a constitutional creation of Parliament, the BBC could not be impartial towards the maintenance or dissolution of the nation or towards illegal behaviour.

However, as a general rule, the BBC World Service refrains from using the term ‘terrorists’, which is perceived to be too loaded and prefers to resort to more neutral terms, even when the brutality involved in the violent crime against innocent civilians is obscene. BBC News aspires to be the world’s most trusted news organisation: accurate, impartial and independent. It aims to be truthful and fair, offering journalism that explores multiple viewpoints and gives voice to a wide range of opinions in order to serve all audiences. BBC News seeks to act in the public interest and to resist pressure from political parties, lobby groups or commercial interests (http://www.bbcgovernors.co.uk/annreport/report05/42–45.txt).13

However, these laudable aspirations lead to moral neutrality, and to inability to denounce terrorism even when facing the most hideous acts. The most recent controversy took place after the July 7, 2005 attack on London, when the BBC allegedly preferred to use the term ‘bombers’ in reference to the terrorists who murdered more than 50 people in the attack (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/complaints/news/2005/07/13/20561.shtml).14>

Instead of adhering to one principled definition of terrorism and then employ it across the board regarding any individual or groups that resort to terror, the BBC prefers to sit on the fence and employ no moral judgment, so as to say that it is impossible to differentiate between terrorists and ‘freedom fighters’, that terrorist for one might be a ‘freedom fighter’ for the other, and in order not to alienate any segment of their viewers they play a UN role of sorts, taking no sides, employing no moral judgment, paying homage to moral relativism. Even when terrorists took over children in Beslan (September 2004) and murdered hundreds of them, the BBC preferred to call those people ‘gunmen’, ‘attackers’, ‘Chechen separatists’, and ‘hostage takers’(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/world/04/russian\_s/html/1.stm; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5018928.stm). I have asked senior editors in the BBC whether the Beslan atrocity is questionable and could be interpreted as anything but terrorism (“freedom fighting”?). The response was that the “gun men” did act of terror; still the BBC did not call them terrorists, loyal to their sitting-on-the-fence, neutral policy.15 I hasten to think that one who conducts act of terror is a terrorist, exactly as one who murders deserves to be called murderer, and one who rapes is a rapist.

Terrorism is defined here as the threat or employment of violence against random citizens for political, religious, or ideological purposes by individuals or groups who wish to evoke fear and are willing to justify all means to achieve their goals. The underlying assumption is that a zero sum game exists between terrorism and democracy, i.e., a win for the one constitutes a loss for the other (Cohen-Almagor 2005: 383–409). Bearing this in mind, I have asked David E. Hoffman, Foreign Editor of the Washington Post, about their policy on coverage of terrorism. He said that “our first obligation to readers is to tell them what happened, as precisely as possible”. When the Post resorts to labels, editors

strive to avoid being tendentious. We do not automatically apply a label to a group just because someone else has used it. Reporters believe we should use our journalism to delve into the specifics about an organization rather than slap a label on it. We should give readers facts and quotes – even if from disputed parties – about how to characterize an organization.

The Post prides itself on observation and discovery at first-hand, rather than relying on derivative or second-hand information from others, whenever possible. The Post strives to tell the reader as much context as possible about the actions by both sides. Hoffman concluded that “In general, we seek to be careful and precise when describing the motivations of groups or individuals involved in violence and terrorism”.16 As a result, the Post does not rule out using the term ‘terrorism’ in the appropriate circumstances.

The media need not be objective towards terror, racism, cannibalism, genocide and slavery. In contrast to the demand for objectivity on the part of the media that is often echoed, the media do not have to be objective towards phenomena which contradict their basic values.

## NC Frontlines

### First, as an overview on my opponent’s case.

#### Prioritizing objectivity in journalism is in itself a contradiction. All of the affirmative’s arguments that value-free journalism is better than other forms of journalism is inherently a value statement.

Muñoz-Torres 12 [Juan Ramón Muñoz-Torres, “TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY IN JOURNALISM”, Journalism Studies, 13:4, 566-582, 2012. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2012.662401] CT

The Contradictions Inherent in the Theory of Objectivity

To conclude this section, I will now try to show briefly that the positivist claim about objectivity, whether in science or in knowledge in general, is not only impossible, but a contradiction in itself.

Indeed. As soon as one says: ‘‘knowledge, in order to be objective, must be valuefree’’, one is thereby making an implicit value judgement, which holds neutrality as the paramount value. In other words, positivism claims that only value-free knowledge is true knowledge and, hence, values must be eradicated from it; or else that factual knowledge must be pursued, because it is much better than evaluative knowledge.

If we consider these tenets carefully, we will realize at once that they are not factual statements at all, since they are not based upon facts, do not stem from experience and cannot be verified empirically. Rather, they are value judgements in disguise, presented as if they were evident as axioms, while they are not.

In the terrain of media, language is also quite revealing (e.g. Mun˜ oz-Torres, 2007). Journalists must be objective, because value judgements, inasmuch as they distort reality, are deemed bad. Instead, the right thing for a journalist is trying to be neutral, keeping equal distance from contending sources, because inserting one’s opinions in a story is ‘‘risky’’ (Rich, 1997, p. 204). As in the case of science, those who demand excluding values from knowledge do so because they paradoxically think that this is the best way of knowing. Therefore, values do emerge in the basic presumptions of positivism, at its very origin.

From the arguments briefly sketched in the three preceding sections, a clear conclusion can be drawn: the factvalue dichotomy\*in spite of presenting itself as neat and unproblematic, as if it were an axiom\*is false and rationally untenable. It skilfully establishes a false dualism between facts and values, as if they could be really isolated from each other, thereby ignoring that they are intermingled in reality, which is far more complex than a clear, but mistaken distinction.