

Yes, Socrates, There Is A Santa Claus:

And Why Journalists, the Modern-Day
Philosopher Kings, Are the Ones to Tell Us

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Socrates's Ideal

Socrates envisioned his philosopher king ruling his ideal Republic with society's best interests in mind. The philosopher king's steady, all-encompassing rule would insure truth and justice prevailed. Unfortunately, in the 2,400 years since Socrates's time, society has not found itself a philosopher king as the ancient Greek wished. As a result, Socrates's ideal educational system, government, and other aspects of society have not been implemented. Instead, society has handed itself over to journalists. Journalists inform, persuade, and police society. In order to fulfill these responsibilities of a modern journalist justly, many traits of Socrates's philosopher king must be present: an impeccable knowledge of the topic matter, a deep credibility, and a complete grasp of the proper use of rhetoric.

Journalists hold a unique spot in modern society. They are able to influence civic life in nearly every realm, most significantly the public's view of government. Journalists' role as public servants relies heavily on the mold of their employers, but even more on the method of their practices. Like Socrates' philosopher king, a journalist's methods and morals are as important to the task as the content of the task. Just as Socrates expresses disapproval of an unjust argument which appears just, a journalist must craft a just story only using just methods. The slightest misstep could compromise the entire effort.

Socrates enters into debate initially with Glaucon and Adeimantus over the role and worthiness of justice and injustice. The two brothers struggle with the capability of injustice to trump justice so quickly in the public eye. During his round-about method of

proving otherwise, Socrates provides not only the entire *Republic*, but also his idea of a philosopher. “Since philosophers are those who are able to grasp what is always the same in all respects, while those who are not able to do so but wander among what is many and varies in all ways are not philosophers” (484b). Proper philosophers must understand the root of all matters at hand, no matter how seemingly obscure, while the rest of man looks at some of these matters in complete bafflement. By understanding the foundations of matters, the philosopher has at least acknowledged the presence of the “Form,” in the Socratic sense, and has taken the first step to understanding the Form.

If a journalist takes a similar approach and attempts to know the root of all matters, the journalist will need to employ intellect, the only way to reach the Forms (511e). By handling the intelligible realm with tact, the journalist will win the trust of the readers, thus grasping the visible realm as well.

The only way to come close to this pinnacle of knowledge is to pursue it from a young age with a single-minded ambition. “Therefore the man who is really a lover of learning must from youth on strive as intensely as possible for every kind of truth” (485d). Setting forth to find the truth could be considered a weighty task, but it is necessary considering the weight of responsibility which will fall to the philosopher, and especially the idealistic possibility of the philosopher king. The closest Socrates comes to describing his philosopher king is amidst his ship and its continuous mutiny analogy. There, while seaman after seaman tries to take control of the ship’s direction, each does so arrogantly and blindly. “They don’t know that for the true pilot it is necessary to pay careful attention to year, seasons, heaven, stars, winds, and everything that’s proper to the

art, if he is really going to be skilled at ruling a ship” (488d). Such as it is with the philosopher king and society. He must not only look to manage the government, but also how to influence the public with it, in what manner they should interact, how the public should be spread throughout the Republic, and so forth.

The Downfall of Many Writers & Orators

In managing this Republic, Socrates cringes at the thought of the writers of his era influencing the youth’s education. Primarily, Socrates dissects Homer and poetry into a series of faults. “The ones Hesiod and Homer told us, and the other poets too. They surely composed false tales for human beings and used to tell them and still do tell them ... Not even if they were true would I suppose they should so easily be told to thoughtless young things” (377d-387a). Homer’s penchant for grand tales mixing gods with men in times of war and times of peace strikes Socrates as the epitome of foolhardy yet dangerous banter. If impressionable minds read Homer, they may think the world actually functions as such, and develop far more courage than intellect and become unbalanced individuals, contrary to what the Republic needs to prosper.

Socrates expands his disdain for Homer to all writers who attempt to mold styles:

The same man isn’t able to imitate many things as well as one ... He’ll hardly pursue any of the noteworthy activities while at the same time imitating many things and being a skilled imitator. For even in two kinds of imitation that seem close to one another, like writing comedy and tragedy, the same men aren’t capable of producing good imitations in both at the same time. (395a)

Furthermore, Socrates criticizes those who write with a primary motivation of being heard and remembered. One should write, or give speeches for that matter, because it is the just thing to do, not in order to leave a distinct impression on those listening.

Then if his speech remains on the books, it is in a joyful frame of mind that its author leaves the scene; but if it is erased and he is deprived of his share of speechmaking and loses his status as an author, both he and his friends are depressed (Phaedrus 43).

Just as the philosopher king needs to be fully aware of his topic matter, Socrates feels a writer needs to be fully aware of his, and in the case of the writer, the mind apparently only has space for one realm of topic matter. “There is nothing in itself disgraceful about writing speeches ... But the disgrace comes in when the speaking and the writing is not good, when it is, in fact, disgracefully bad” (44). Contrarily, and more appropriately, a speech should be “well and fairly spoken,” as the speaker must “know the truth about the matters he intends to discuss” (46).

The Success of Many Writers & Orators

In order to avoid this “disgracefully bad” writing and “two kinds of imitation,” a writer must focus on the truth (46). To Socrates, truth unlocks all other doors. Without it, no passage is worthwhile, hence the difficulty with Homer. With it, every passage has some redeeming value. “The nature of the truth is my theme. It is there that Reality lives, without shape or color, intangible, visible only to reason, the soul’s pilot; and all true knowledge is knowledge of her” (30). Even the simpleton, or as Socrates refers to him – the Spartan, knows the necessity of truth. “Without a grip on truth,” says the Spartan to whom Socrates refers, “there can be no genuine art of speaking either now or in the future” (47). Or, in the words of a modern-day axiom common among journalists, “Good writing is simple writing. Only confusion complicated, truth never.” (Runes 121) With the truth, however, a writing can rise to such a level it not only brings forth facts and adept comparisons, but also discovers falsehoods put forth by others (49).

Jumping forward about 800 years to the teachings of Augustine, and writing and its worth have jumped forward as well. All men learn what God wishes via what they see in the universe and his signs. Deriving from those signs come man's own, conventional signs. These signs possess great power, great responsibility, as they can affect others' interpretations of signs and others' paths to God. "The proper use of conventional signs can prompt a fellowman to find his way to God, or can sidetrack him into error and disbelief and ultimately into sin, which is leading him away from God" (Murphy 208). As all that is around us originally derives from God, our methods of describing them innately do as well. Thus, our rhetoric can influence not only our own path to heaven, but the path of anyone we try to influence. Suddenly, rhetoric holds a high place in society.

Rhetoric, More Recently

"The man who writes, the man who month in and month out, week in and week in and week out, day in and day out, furnishes the material which is to shape the thoughts of our people, is essentially the man who more than any other determines the character of the people and the kind of government this people shall possess."

- President Theodore Roosevelt addressing the Dinner of the Periodical Publishers' Association of America, April 7, 1904 (Roosevelt 7)

While it could be said Roosevelt was simply speaking to his audience, Socrates' advice on rhetoric, millennia earlier, suggests otherwise. Roosevelt spoke the truth. Just as Augustine saw the power of rhetoric to influence fellowman's path to God, it can also influence fellowman's view of government. Twentieth century philosopher Hannah Arendt understood this, even as the governments around the world fell to dictatorships and communism. "The telling of factual truth comprehends much more than the daily

information supplied by journalists, though without them we should never find our bearings in an ever-changing world and, in the most literal sense, would never know where we are” (Arendt 312). Arendt sees such importance in journalism – just as Roosevelt did – she insists it be kept separate from all else. If journalism were to be compromised, then Arendt feels mankind would become even more lost than he already was in the twentieth century. Without journalism around to pull society out of the mess of the Holocaust and two World Wars, society would devolve. “For this very important political function of supplying information is exercised from outside the political realm, strictly speaking; no action and no desire are, or should be, involved” (312).

This independent necessity of the press is supplemented by the power of the press. When Alexis de Tocqueville came to the United States to study America in the early nineteenth century, he was struck by the state of the journalism industry in the developing country. Though in different time periods, de Tocqueville viewed journalists, or speech-givers, with a similar respect as Augustine, Roosevelt and Arendt did. “The words of one strong-minded man, addressed to the passions of a listening assembly, have more power than the vociferations of a thousand orators” (Tocqueville 92). Yet, in America, Tocqueville saw a void of power. In essence, the plethora of newspapers in America yielded a too many cooks in the kitchen effect, robbing any few newspapers of the influence Tocqueville felt they should hold. “They cannot form those great currents of opinion which sweep away the strongest dikes ... When many organs of the press adopt the same line of conflict, their influence in the long run becomes irresistible ... In the United States, each separate journal exercises but little authority” (94).

Nonetheless, Tocqueville sees the power of the press as second only to the power of the people, which it, in fact, enables itself (94). The power of the people relies on a forum of sorts to foster and further the thoughts of the public. Media provide this; in America, this role has primarily been fulfilled by newspapers. Through newspapers, a public conversation transpires which develops public opinion concerning any and all matters. “Thus, journalism contributes to the possibility of a community’s self-governance ... These developments make possible a central element of a flourishing civil society – the autonomous participation of citizens in a deliberation about the common good.” (Tollefsen 296).

Journalism’s Essential Grip on Content

While journalism, newspapers in particular, provides the public a medium for discourse, it does not yield control of content to the public. Rather, for the sake of democracy, journalism cannot function as a democracy in the sense of what readers learn. “If democracy depends on information, then journalists work for the public interest by not granting the public a vote over what we do” (Auletta). As public servants indeed, journalists hold the fate of many in their hands, just as Augustine and Arendt inferred earlier, and thus, they should remain unbiased, even if Tocqueville argued otherwise, for a centralized, opinionated press.

Tocqueville came from a continent where one or two newspapers determined the direction of each country. Oftentimes these newspapers blatantly aligned with political parties to further their agendas. In America, from the outset of the colonies, while partisan pamphlets were certainly distributed, the majority of newspapers held on to the

ideal of responsible reporting. In theory, this has held true into the twenty-first century. In practice, some debate, and some debate, like Tocqueville, abandoning this practice may be for the best. “They believe [a partisan press] will produce a marketplace of ideas,” Auletta said in his Red Smith Lecture, “Whom Do Journalists Work For?” Auletta continued, refuting this stance, “Conservatives will seek facts from their outlets, and liberals from theirs. There will be no common set of facts. The press will be even more distrusted than it is today.” Such a strategy would fly in the face of Socrates’ insistence, “If a speech is to be well and fairly spoken, must not the mind of the speaker know the truth about the matters he intends to discuss?” (Phaedrus 46)

Even when foregoing the partisan strategy, and maintaining an unbiased approach, the “distrust” Auletta refers to has been prevalent for millennia. Socrates did not trust those who conveyed anything more than the minimal style, feeling they corrupted the youth. Surprisingly, his opinions were not revolutionary, as Herodotus only became the first historian as he stuck to what he claimed were facts. His style of straight history matched with Socrates’ demands. Into the nineteenth century, skepticism remained of those who worked with flair, attempting for more than the simplest manners. Two distinctions should be made of this point: First, the “deep and growing belief ... that there are fundamental failures in journalism” has been a constant through time (Rider 472), and secondly, this distrust is not pivoted on the purpose of journalism, but rather the tactics of some of its practitioners. “In all this there is no issue raised with journalism itself. Its failures and abuses alone are in question, and of these every man should judge and speak without fear or favor” (473).

A Lack of Trust ...

“Without fear or favor” the public has indeed spoken. In the last twenty-six years, the public faith in journalism has dwindled to levels which even George Rider, our eighteenth century cynic, would find startling. In 1985, 34 percent of readers felt stories in any medium to be inaccurate. By 2001, that figure had nearly doubled to 66 percent. Similarly, in 1985, 53 percent of readers felt the news favored one side of the political spectrum; in 2001, 77 percent claimed as much (“Press”). Without too much trouble, many trace these epidemics to journalism’s bending to the all-mighty dollar, and this sentiment traces back to Rider as well, though he used rather descriptive terms for it:

Clearly, a power greater than journalism has thrust a golden ring through its nose and leads it, exclusive chattel and creature. And what can journalism, manacled and branded as private property, or in bondage to its advertisers, say bravely, or worthily, or trustfully, about anything, so long as it fetters chafe and constrain? ... Until journalism breaks loose from all equivocal and venal affiliations, it must be shorn of its moral dignity and content itself with a languishing and spasmodic influence (Rider 473-4).

Whether Socrates’, the eighteenth century’s, or the current decline, “This lack of trust is a dagger aimed at a journalist’s heart” (Auletta). This lack of trust manifests itself in declining revenues, which, in turn, lead to even less trust. As the revenues decline, editors and publishers feel the pressure to appeal to the consumer. In doing so, they run the risk of running more stories about one political party or the other, or favoring soft news. In doing so, they further compromise the trust already lacking. “It is, of course, urged that competition and the insatiable hunger of the people for such disclosures force journalism into such contemptible straits in these untidy directions; and that if people insist upon gossip, the papers must supply it, or go to the wall” (Rider 479).

... Thanks To A Lack of Money

When faced with this choice, many media have chosen to supply the “gossip.” In doing so, their revenues have bounced since the financial crisis which climaxed in 2008. Every medium except newspapers saw its revenue increase from 2009 to 2010, led by local television’s 17 percent increase and online news sites’ 13.9 percent leap. Meanwhile, newspapers went to “the wall,” hoping by sticking to their principles, readers may remain loyal. Instead, revenues continued to fall, by 6.4 percent in 2010 (“State”).

One point to the newspapers fall is the rise of online news, a veritable foe. Yet the trends of online news are still too short-term to analyze accurately. While Twitter and paywalls baffle publishers, even readers are still learning their intricacies. Until these trends can be seen over a decade or more, it is hard to render a verdict as to the rise of online revenues, or, for that matter, why online news was the only medium to experience a spike in readership between 2009 and 2010. While online news gained 17.1 percent in readership, newspapers lost five percent – a small victory when compared to cable television, which lost a whopping 13.7 percent. This marked the first instance more of the public admitted to getting news online rather than from newspapers (“State”).

These drops obviously bring immense concerns to journalists, yet the key to success remains the truth of which Socrates spoke so fondly. Rider’s fears of money, or, as he put it, “a golden ring through [journalism’s] nose,” can also be trumped by a pursuit of the truth, though it does sound extremely naïve and idealistic. For starters, embracing this theory, “including the folks who sign our checks,” would lead to less concerns about

how each newspaper does on the New York Stock Exchange (Auletta). Obviously, the corporate side of newspapers and journalism in general would not leap at this prospect:

And what might the CEOs who sign our checks say to this? ... They would say that employees in public companies, including its journalists, are also concerned about the stock price because their pensions and stock are linked to it. They would say that without money from Wall Street investors, media companies will not be able to raise the capital that buys expensive printing presses or funds overseas bureaus. ... They would say the press must abandon its elitist model and give the public more of what it wants rather than what we think it needs. For the public does not just consume news to be educated, they also wish to be entertained. Some journalists may rail at Michael Jackson coverage, but there's an audience for it. (Auletta)

Unfortunately, history has examples which prove these CEOs correct. These examples are also rife with corrupt journalism, oftentimes flat-out fictional journalism.

The Spanish-American War, for example, came to be largely because of a desire to sell papers by Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, owners of *The New York World* and *The New York Journal*, respectively. Pulitzer and Hearst not only recognized a war would bring heavy readership, but it would also bring them national influence. Hearst commissioned his reporters to write stories intended to evoke American sympathy. In modern history books, the United States' involvement in the war is largely attributed to the "yellow journalism" propagated by Pulitzer and Hearst ("Crucible"). "Although it may be an exaggeration to claim that Hearst and other yellow journalists started the war, it is fair to say that the press fueled the public's passion for war" ("Crucible"). Without the sensationalist headlines, a mere public rumbling would never have turned into the uproar necessary for the American involvement. In generating the uproar, Pulitzer and Hearst – the CEOs – fattened their wallets.

Pulitzer and Hearst would presumably have made the same claims Auletta's CEOs did. Journalists need the paper to do well financially in order to do their job well journalistically. In fact, Pulitzer made his own versions of them in his missive defending his foundation of the Columbia Journalism School in 1904:

The more successful a newspaper is commercially, the better for its moral side. The more prosperous it is, the more independent it can afford to be, the higher salaries it can pay to editors and reporters, the less subject it will be to temptation, the better it can stand losses for the sake of principle and conviction (Pulitzer 659).

Pulitzer defends his money management techniques in an effort to make the work environment healthier for his journalists, yet he drew a distinct line, insisting the financials be kept separate from the journalists:

But commercialism ... becomes a degradation and a danger when it invades the editorial rooms. Once let the public come to regard the press as exclusively a commercial business and there is an end of its moral power. Influence cannot exist with public confidence. And that confidence must have a human basis. It must rest in the end on the character of the journalist (Pulitzer 659).

Whether Pulitzer religiously followed his arguments or not, he indicates a difficult yet necessary divide in order for the truth to be preserved. If the journalists are concerned with turning a profit, their stories are altered, as is how they spend their hours in the office and their handling of particular sources. "We have to find a language to help [the business folks] understand that they will not be able to build a valuable journalistic brand without good journalism, which is expensive" (Auletta).

It is a vicious cycle: If the business reaches into the editorial side, the journalism suffers, and profits dwindle even further, so the financial concerns heighten even further. Contrarily, if the editorial side reaches into the financials, the journalism may boom but it

comes at a distinct cost. Once again, profits dwindle, so the financial concerns heighten, though the journalists argue the only way to soothe them is to create better – more expensive – journalism.

In Credibility Lies the Answer

Yet it all returns to the truth. Lying, in any form, is a fatal plague in newsrooms. “In news – and this is the part business executive often miss – credibility is the brand ... A synonym for credibility is trust” (Auletta). This task can prove to be difficult, though, and therein is the initial spark to the public’s mistrust. Red Smith, a famed American sports writer (and Notre Dame Class of 1961) who worked across the country for the majority of the 20th century, was known for his columns, but he cared more for legitimate reporting. “The guy I admire most in the world is a good reporter,” Smith once wrote. “I respect a good reporter, and I’d like to be called that. I’d like to be considered good and honest and reasonably accurate. The reporter has one of the toughest jobs in the world – getting as near the truth as possible is a terribly tough job.” (Schmuhl xvii)

Not only must the public trust the journalist, but it must trust the journalist knows his topic. “A man must first know the truth about every single subject on which he speaks or writes” (Phaedrus 72). Once knowing the truth, a journalist can gain the public’s trust, and the public will rarely, if ever, turn its back on the truth. Truth is so powerful, Thomas Hobbes ended his *Leviathan* acknowledging the one power capable of reaching all mankind, “For such Truth, as opposeth no man’s profit, nor pleasure, is to all men welcome” (Hobbes 528).

With that truth comes an innate civic duty. The ship's pilot must not only be aware of the "year, seasons, heaven, stars, winds, and everything that's proper to the art," but he must also physically steer the ship (Republic 488d). All those admirable traits are worthless if not applied. Thus, a journalist, once fully-knowledgeable about his topic, holding the public's trust and looking to maintain his credibility, he must also write. And he must know to whom he writes. "A newspaper, therefore, always represents an association which is composed of its habitual readers" (Tocqueville 204). Furthermore, he must know the effects of the words he utilizes, as they greatly influence the rhetoric at hand (Phaedrus 51). With this full knowledge, the writer can handle even the most delicate of situations.

In September of 1897, for example, eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon wrote to *The New York Sun* with a simple question: "Is there a Santa Claus?" Virginia's father so trusted the newspaper, he had answered the same inquiry from his daughter with, "If you see it in *The Sun*, it's so." He knew both *The Sun* published fairly, and it would know how to handle his daughter's premature holiday cheer. By directing his daughter to *The Sun*, Virginia's father showed just how necessary journalism is to civil society (Church).

Journalism: A Necessity

In fact, aside from Socrate's initial misgivings regarding Homer's broad strokes, the general failings of poetry, and the occasional narcissism of speech-giving, journalism's necessity has never been questioned. Again, it is the failing of individual journalists or organizations which drive up the public's lack of trust. Nonetheless, "journalism, as the trusty collector and dispenser of news worth having, is easily

understood. There is nothing mysterious or inscrutable about it ... Plainly enough, its development is its own justification” (Rider 471-2). Tollefsen declares the profession downright critical to a successful Republic. “The goods internal to the practice that is foundational to journalism are goods central to the possibility of a flourishing society” (Tollefsen 294). Amidst this praise, the journalist must remember whom he works for: the readers, not the shareholders, the audience, not the corporate parent (Auletta).

“The journalist’s opportunity is beyond estimate. To him are given the keys of every study, the entry to every family, the ear of every citizen when at ease and in his most receptive moods ... He is not a king, but he nurtures and trains the king, and the land is ruled by the public opinion he evokes and shapes. If you value this good land the Lord has given us ... look well to the nurture and training of your king.”

- Whitelaw Reid, Editor of The New York Tribune, U.S. diplomat (Harrington, v)

While the journalist’s opportunity is nearly boundless, its primary function remains to foster and develop “public conversation by which a community assesses its needs” in order to lend a sense of “self-governance” to the community (Tollefsen 296). In doing so, the journalist’s role is defined by society, while it simultaneously defines society. Tocqueville’s frustrations with the American media and its lack of influence stemmed from the opportunity he felt was being lost. “Nothing but a newspaper can drop the same thought into a thousand minds at the same moment” (202). Tocqueville was completely correct, but whereas he felt these thoughts should be the seeds of opinion, American journalists have instead insisted upon stating facts – the truth. Tocqueville referred to a newspaper as “an adviser who does not require to be sought, but who comes of his own accord, and talks to you briefly every day of his common weal, without distracting from your private affairs” (202). This description holds just as strongly when

applied to facts instead of opinions. A financial adviser can explain which stocks he hopes to put his money in, or he can explain why he put his money in them. The former explanation may be encouraging, but it is the latter explanation which inspires confidence and informs the advisee. A newspaper aims to do the latter, even when doing the former.

Thus, in those rare occurrences where one story and one story alone consumes the media, it is the media's responsibility to inform its consumers of the facts more than anything else regarding the breaking news. Even if it seems more information is dispensed than necessary, as long as it maintains its truth, it holds its value. In the last five years, only seven news stories have consumed more than 50 percent of the news in a one-week period. Of every story in that week, referred to as the newshole, only one story topped 60 percent, or, for that matter, 57 percent to be precise. The 2008 presidential election obviously drew more media attention than any other happenings at the time. The week of the party conventions, August 25-31, 69 percent of the newshole focused on the election, primarily Barack Obama's nomination by the Democratic Party in Denver and John McCain choosing Sarah Palin as his Republican vice presidential nominee in St. Paul. Some felt the coverage crossed into over-saturation, but as it was the most important story, by far, at the time, the 69 percent figure stands to be reasonable, especially since the stories were fresh and accurately-reported ("Year").

Contrarily, the first story in 2011 to cross the 50 percent threshold was not accurately-reported, and there, journalists failed. When a gunman in Tucson, Arizona, killed six people and severely wounded United States Congresswomen Gabrielle Giffords, the media responded. In the week of January 10-16, 57 percent of the newshole

was devoted to the shooting and its aftermath. That aftermath included many news outlets retracting their initial statements saying the gunman had killed Giffords. It took some outlets six hours longer than others to retract this false information, leaving consumers exceedingly confused (“Year”).

A Niche for Opinions

When an adviser delivers falsehoods as facts, it is worse than delivering opinions. At least consumers recognize opinions as just that. When falsehoods are delivered as facts, consumers develop opinions which have no validity whatsoever. Without abiding to Socrates’ devotion to truth above all else, journalists fail. Finding the truth should come above all else, or else the consumers will go elsewhere, or, preferably, make their disdain known, as Ken Smith of South Bend did December 7, 2011, to *The South Bend Tribune*.

Washington’s blame game is old news and reprinting two balanced examples of it, as the paper did recently, is a beautiful way to surrender to the wretched status quo in American politics. Instead, I need journalists to help me see past the finger-pointing to whatever is likely to be the truth of the matter. (Smith)

Smith, like Virginia’s father, wanted the media to tell him the truth as only it can. Yet, especially in the United States, this proves to be difficult. The media, at least newspapers, prefer to rattle off the facts and leave the consumer to decipher them. “North American journalism carries a baggage of tradition that supposes it is best to make matters simple for newspaper readers and not strain them” (Goodman 36). Even when discussing his audience, Auletta insisted it is not his place to find the truth behind matters. “We are not there to judge who is right or wrong, but we are there to adjudicate facts” (Auletta).

Auletta's preference for the newspaper's unbiased, all-inclusive fact-giving traces back to a precedent set by Homer, according to Arendt. "Homer chose to sing the deeds of the Trojans no less than of the Achaeans, and to praise the glory of Hector, the foe and the defeated man, no less than the glory of Achilles, the hero of his kinfolk" (312). In remembering both the adored and deplored, Homer gave credence to both sides of an argument. If the vanquished foe deserves a few lines of print, then certainly so does the presidential candidate with few funds. "This had happened nowhere before; no other civilization, however splendid, had been able to look with equal eyes upon friend and foe, upon success and defeat" (313). Smith disagrees strongly with such a tactic. Someone must have won, and someone must be right. Smith prefers the newspaper bring those conclusions to the forefront for him. "On that point, let me say that the best two editorials I have read in *The Tribune* in the last two years were accurate, but they were not balanced. Instead, they spoke uncomfortable truth to local power. Three cheers for that!"

Homer's inclusionary tactics point to another primary duty of journalism in a modern context: fostering a unified community, one with a sense of "we." Tocqueville saw this sense of community as the lifeblood for newspapers, both the sustaining and driving force. "This association may be more or less defined, more or less restricted, more or less numerous; but the fact that the newspaper keeps alive, is a proof that at least the germ of such an association exists in the minds of its readers" (204). It is the media's responsibility to spread the information, even the simplest of information such as logistics or public service announcements, so all can have the knowledge in common. "If there were no newspapers, there would be no common activity" (Tocqueville 202).

The Morals of Distributing the News

Even as the sustaining and driving force to journalism, news plays second fiddle to the morals of distributing the news, as cliché as it sounds, the soul of journalism.

“What is life without character? What is the life of a nation or individual without honor, without heart and soul?” (Pulitzer 667) Pulitzer continued to cite the courage, the integrity and humanity as the essence of a media outlet. “Without these there may be smart journalists, but never a truly great or honorable one” (668). And certainly not one resembling Socrates’ philosopher king.

These ideals are violated all-too frequently in today’s age though, and it is an age of technology where these violations cause the most harm. Deborah Tannen speaks frequently of an “argument culture” where the instinct is not to think and respond, but rather to employ a “knee-jerk” reaction with an adversarial nature (Tannen 20). These rapid-fire responses lead to more pseudo-information than ever before. “Pseudo-” is included as most of this information is opinion disguised as information. Selected facts are thrown into arguments in vain attempts at justification. With the excess information and increase in data, intelligent thoughts are much more difficult to find. “When information is in greater supply, knowledge is harder, not easier, to create, because we have to sift through more facts, more assertions, more stuff, to arrive at it. An abundance of information often means more dissonance, more contradictions” (Kovach 47). In this age of online news sites, Twitter, and a 24-hour news cycle, the influx of information is unceasing, and thus, ever-confusing.

Though, this is not a new phenomenon. When Bruno Richard Hauptmann was convicted guilty of kidnapping and murdering Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr., in 1936, the media found more ways to gather and disperse information than ever before seen. During the five-week trial, reporters would smuggle cameras and microphones into the courtroom to document the proceedings. Baltimore journalist H.L. Mencken deemed the trial “the biggest story since the Resurrection.” As the information flooded the streets, rumors of no basis about the pilot of *The Spirit of St. Louis* ran rampant (Shahid).

As a result, courtroom rules now limit the use of cameras and microphones, often flat-out prohibiting them. The two-year study following the Lindbergh-Hauptmann trial changed protocols for an ensuing century, yet in doing so, did not inhibit the power of the press. “The press cannot create human passions, however skillfully it may kindle them where they exist” (Tocqueville 92). During those five weeks in 1936, the media did not incite the public’s rumor mill, it only fed one which already arose. Today, the cable news networks do not split the viewership by political party with their antics. Rather, the viewership was already split and simply looking for something to view.

As the viewers seek news, the journalist holds the confidence of the community in his hand. Yet time and time again, this confidence is shattered. Socrates denounces the profession before it gains its footing, Tocqueville sees a weak impersonation where he seeks a strong foundation, and the trust factor plummets over the last 26 years. Instead of looking at their audience as standard-seekers, journalists look at the consumers as a people needing to be fed. As discussed earlier, this is not inherently wrong. The media functions in the best interests of society when it chooses the news for the audience, and

not vice versa. But then, who will hold the media accountable aside from the dropping indices? Pulitzer wished it would be the media itself. “May we not hope that a similar education [as to the one a cadet at West Point receives] will in the future create a similar corps feeling among journalists – the same pride in the profession, the same determination to do nothing ‘unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman’?” (650)

Such is what Pulitzer sought when he founded the first Journalism School. He desired such high morals within the industry it would police itself. In many ways, the rise of *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart and *The Colbert Report* with Stephen Colbert, both shown on *Comedy Central*, have led to this phenomenon indeed. Through their reporting on reporting, literally discussing the methods which journalists use each and every day, Stewart and Colbert put lazy journalists on the hot seat. While their tactics often expose them to derision as mere comedians, both Stewart and Colbert have led to a higher standard of accountability in journalism, primarily cable news.

Nonetheless, it remains the consumer journalists serve, and the consumer they bow before. “As for the audience in a mass society: it ‘often treats its author much as kings usually behave toward their courtiers: it enriches and despises them’” (Lerner 95-6). Thus, the weight upon journalists’ shoulders bears down with the word “trust” still emblazoned upon it. In addition, modernly, the public bestows pity upon journalists.

Yet Morals Cannot Be Taught

“You bump into people and they’re like, ‘Aww, you’re in the newspaper business. I’m sorry about that.’ It got to a point that we’re tired of hearing that kind of positioning coming at us.”

- Mark Woodruff, vice president of market development for Cincinnati Enquirer Media (Sonderman)

In a similar fashion, Socrates' philosopher king was not well-regarded by society.

Oftentimes, it seemed as if Socrates doubted the real purpose of the philosopher king.

I believe, Anytus, that there are many men here who are good at public affairs, and that there have been as many in the past, but have they been good teachers of their own virtue? That is the point we are discussing, not whether there are good men here or not, or whether there have been in the past, but we have been investigating for some time whether virtue can be taught. And in that course of investigation we are inquiring whether the good men of today and of the past knew how to pass on to another the virtue they themselves possessed, or whether a man cannot pass it on or receive it from another (Meno 26).

Eventually Socrates concluded virtue cannot be taught, rather it is “present in those of us who may possess it as a gift from the gods.” (32) Nonetheless, the philosopher king's role holds a purpose, as there are other things to teach, which oftentimes help those who possess virtue find it.

For true opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man's mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why. And that, Meno my friend, is recollection as we previously agreed. After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down (30).

The philosopher king was not a job desired by many. Just like journalism, it required “the widest and the deepest knowledge and the firmest foundations of character” (Pulitzer 663), wherein acquiring that knowledge is the challenge. It is also the only salvation for journalism. Amid the vicious cycle pitting the editorial side against the financial side, the falling trust of the public – if it ever trusted the media in the first place, and the steep responsibility facing journalists as they hold the society's fate in their

hands, knowing the truth throughout it all is the only path to success. Pulitzer charges the journalism industry “to teach the student that what makes a newspaper is not type, nor presses, nor advertising, but brains, conscience, character working out in public service” (678).

This strategy is nothing new to society. It, in fact, traces to the time of Herodotus and Socrates, to Thucydides. “The Greek historian Thucydides shrewdly wrote that when a nation makes too great a distinction between its scholars and its warriors it winds up having its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools” (McDonnell 80). As Socrates urged for both rhetoric and gymnastic lessons to the youth, Thucydides called for the same balance. This balance is what evades journalists, as of all Pulitzer’s recommendations, he never urged them to study philosophy. Ethics are only taught as they relate to journalistic situations, not too life in general. “Few journalists know or care as much about philosophy as about government, crime or other journalistic staples. And few philosophers have lucid ideas about how journalists work, or the sorts of things that interest them or strike them as suitable for publication” (Goodman 35).

This dichotomy strikes an irony as the two fields are similar in their responsibilities, if not exceedingly complementary. “Outstanding among the existential modes of truth-telling are the solitude of the philosopher ... and the reporter” (Arendt 311). Both philosophers and journalists are consumed with one thing and one thing only: the truth. The former consumes itself with the pursuit and discovery of the truth, while the latter intends to pursue and discover the truth, but then spends more time telling

others about it. These two noble professions trace to Socrates' intentions for the guardians of his Republic:

Our guardians must give up all other crafts and very precisely to be craftsmen of the city's freedom and practice nothing other than what tends to it – they also mustn't do or imitate anything else. And if they do imitate, they must imitate what's appropriate to them from childhood: men who are courageous, moderate, holy, free, and everything of the sort; and what is slavish, or anything else shameful, they must neither do nor be clever at imitating, so that they won't get a taste for the being from its imitation. (Republic 395c)

Pulitzer saw this relation clearly. In Socrates' time, the sophists ruled the assembly, their orations dictating the path of society. Socrates took particular exception to their tactics as he did not believe virtue could be taught, as mentioned earlier. In his discussion with Meno, Socrates at one point, in reference to virtue, rhetorically asks, knowing all too well the answer:

Can you mention any other subject of which those who claim to be teachers not only are recognized to be teachers of others but are not recognized to have knowledge of it themselves, and are thought to be poor in the very matter which they profess to teach? Or any other subject of which those who are recognized as worthy teachers at one time say it can be taught and at other times that it cannot? Would you say that people who are so confused about a subject can be effective teachers of it? (Meno 28)

In the modern age, the only assemblies come through the media, and the media therefore determines what the public will hear. Socrates would obviously prefer journalists not try to inflict their virtues and vices upon the public, and if they successfully avoid doing so, then perhaps they could lead the assemblies appropriately.

The Athenian democracy could all meet in the popular assembly. There public opinion was made, and accordingly as the people listened to a Pericles or to a Cleon the state flourished or declined. The orator that reaches the American democracy is the newspaper. It alone makes it

possible to keep the political blood in healthful circulation in the veins of a continental republic. (Pulitzer 680)

The newspaperman that reaches American society carries with him the responsibilities of Socrates' philosopher king. He must understand all aspects of society. He must know the truth to what he speaks. He must understand his audience, as well as what it will understand. The journalist of the modern age must not abuse the trust of the public, by doing so he both loses their trust and misguides the public. This misguiding can result in drastic troubles. Augustine would say abusing the power of signs could lead our fellowman and colleagues away from God and a divine afterlife.

Yes, Virginia, There Is A Santa Claus

The public trusts the philosopher king, even if it does not envy him, as he rose to his position with reason. His education fit him well, the balance between harmony and gymnastics creating a well-rounded individual. Under his guidance, society benefits. In the most rudimentary of examples, Socrates's famous cave allegory, the men first withdraw from the philosopher king's teachings. "Don't you suppose he'd be at a loss and believe that what was seen before is truer than what is now shown?" (Republic 515d) In time though, the men removed from the cave think back to their origins, with pity for those remaining. "When he recalled his first home and the wisdom there, and his fellow prisoners in that time, don't you suppose he would consider himself happy for the change and pity the others?" (516c) This transformation is courtesy of an art form, according to Socrates. Without the philosopher king guiding the individuals out of the cave, into the sunlight, and in time, teaching them how to look at the sun, they would never be able to leave the darkness. They are incapable of doing it on their own.

There would, therefore, be an art of this turning around, concerned with the way in which this power can most easily and efficiently be turned around, not an art of producing sight in it. Rather, this art takes as given that sight is there, but not rightly turned nor looking at what it ought to look at, and accomplishes this object (518d).

The public wants to trust the journalist, as it is the journalist who is necessary to guide the public from ignorance to the metaphorical sunlight. “People don’t have to talk to us. They do so for many reasons, among them that they trust we are searching for the honest truth” (Auletta). The search for the “honest truth” is paramount, both to performing the journalist’s task admirably, and to the survival of our society.

In addition to the search though, an accurate and thorough defense of the truth is often necessary to carry writings to an even more credible level.

If a man composes his work with the full knowledge of the truth and can come to the aid of what he has written when he is challenged and has the power to demonstrate from his own mouth the poverty of his writings, he ought not to be designated by a name drawn from them, but by one that indicates his serious pursuits (Phaedrus 73).

At this point, Socrates would recognize the journalist as approaching the levels of his philosopher king. “To call him a lover of wisdom or something similar would be more fitting and more seemly” (74). Such high praise is only possible when truth is placed above all else. As, without it, all other virtues crumble. “What is at stake is survival, the perseverance in existence, and no human world destined to outlast the short life span of mortals within it will ever be able to survive without men willing to do what Herodotus was the first to undertake consciously – namely ... to say what is” (Arendt 296).

The essence of the survival lies in the government’s direction. Even there, the success of a journalist is the only thing to insure a successful, uncorrupt government.

“The power to mould the future of the Republic will be in the hands of the journalists of future generations” (Pulitzer 680). As Socrates’ philosopher king knew best how to pilot the ship, Pulitzer describes the journalist as the “lookout on the bridge of the ship of state.” This journalist watches the weather, watches for icebergs, watches for other boats or perhaps a castaway. He diligently watches for danger, not thinking “of his wages, or of the profits of his owners. He is there to watch over the safety and the welfare of the people who trust him” (Pulitzer 656).

And sometimes, the welfare of the people can be in ways a journalist would never expect. Auletta concluded his Red Smith Lecture by declaring journalists are “as much public servants as the people you elect to office.” Unlike elected officials though, journalists are asked such things as, “Please tell me the truth: is there a Santa Claus?” Here is where journalists have the opportunity to rise to the level of the philosopher king, and Francis Church certainly did so.

Church responded to Virginia’s inquiry with as straightforward as a reply possible, “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.” Church continued, defending a figment of the imagination by referencing similar ideals, “He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy.” He concluded, sounding as if he were Socrates seeking the Forms, “Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.”

Church saw his opportunity to influence even the smallest piece of society in a positive manner by speaking the truth of something of which he certainly was knowledgeable. His insistence upon the ideals of life show a comprehension of the world around him, the same ideals Socrates' philosopher king thrived upon. At its finest, journalism can guide a society on every level, from Virginia to the President, just as the philosopher king did in the Republic.

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