

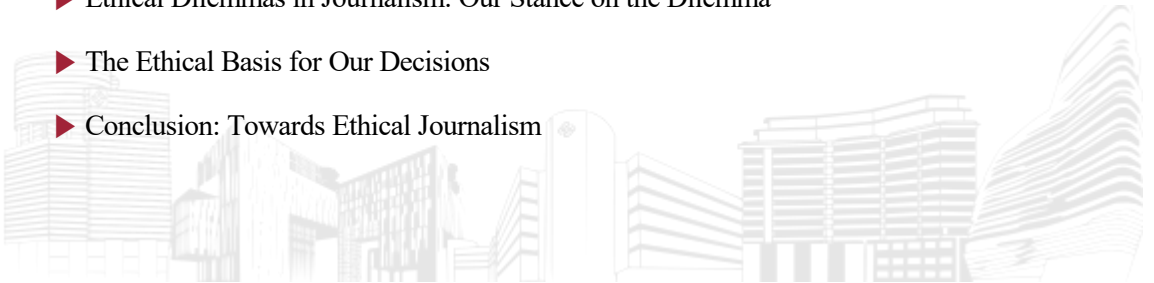
Eternal Dilemma: Journalists' professional responsibilities and moral boundaries -- Reflections on *The Starving Sudan*

Navigating Ethical Dilemmas in Modern Journalism

Group 18



- ▶ Introduction to Journalism Ethics and *The Starving Sudan*
- ▶ Conflict between Professional Responsibility and Social Responsibility of Journalists
- ▶ Ethical Dilemmas in Journalism: Weighing the Consequences of Action, Inaction, and Balance
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Introduction to Journalism Ethics and *The Starving Sudan*

ZHANG Jingyi



Ethical Issues in Journalism

- The confidentiality of information sources
- The fairness of reports
- Individual privacy
- Misleading reports

If Ethics are Missing...

- Decline of social trust
- Intensify negative sentiment of public

Unveiling "The Starving Sudan" Incident

1 Introduction



Photo Overview:

- Photographed by Kevin Carter
- Features a hungry, skinny girl with a vulture lurking behind

Achievement:

- Won the **Pulitzer Prize**

Ethical Debate:

- Whether the photographer should have prioritized helping the girl ?

Conflict between Professional Responsibility and Social Responsibility of Journalists

YUAN Xinyao

Pursue News Value **V.S.** Respect Human Dignity

2 Conflicts



- **Public expectations of the role of journalists**

Provide accurate and timely news reports

Set an example in morality

- **Occupational pressure**

Pursuing impactful stories

The competitive pressure of exclusive news

- **The impact of news reporting**

Give equal importance to information transmission and social influence

Hungry Sudan sparks international attention and promotes humanitarian aid



Pursue News Value **V.S.** Respect Human Dignity

2 Conflicts



- "Photography is essentially an act of non-interference. Intervention makes it impossible to record, and recording makes it impossible to intervene."
—— Susan Sontag, *On Photography*
- "The public's actions depend on the quality of the options provided by others."
—— Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*

Do you agree? Do you have your own ideas?

Ethical Dilemmas in Journalism: Weighing the Consequences of Action, Inaction, and Balance

LI Qishu

Three Ethical Choices and their Possible Outcomes

3 Weighing the Consequences of Action, Inaction, and Balance



- **Option 1: Prioritizing Photography**

Raises awareness, may influence policy, but overlooks immediate help for individuals in need.

- **Option 2: Providing Assistance**

Offers direct aid to the subject, but sacrifices powerful visual evidence that could catalyze global change.

- **Option 3: Balancing Both Action**

Ethical intervention while still capturing critical moments for broader societal impact.



Case-based Argumentation

3 Weighing the Consequences of Action, Inaction, and Balance



- ***Napalm Girl***: taken by photojournalist [Nick Ut](#)

As Nick saw her skin falling away, he put down his camera and took water for the girl. He picked her up and took her to his car and drove her and other children to the hospital.



- **Lu Guang**

He said that his goal of photography has changed from being for money and winning awards to documenting China's history and solving real-life problems. He said, "I'm now thinking about how I can solve these problems properly, and it doesn't matter if I can't solve them, I'll record them first, and recording comes first for me."



Ethical Dilemmas in Journalism: Our Stance on the Dilemma

ZHENG Qianguo



- **What is Utilitarianism?**

Utilitarianism is an ethical theory that suggests moral decisions should be based on the consequences of actions and their impact on overall happiness. The core principle of utilitarianism is to maximize happiness or pleasure for the greatest number of people while minimizing pain or suffering.

According to utilitarianism, an action is morally right if it results in the greatest overall benefit. This means that even if an action appears morally wrong, if it leads to better outcomes for more people, utilitarianism would consider it morally justified.



Analyzing This Ethical Dilemma from a Utilitarian Perspective



4 Our Stance on the Dilemma

•Analyzing "The Starving Sudan" from a Utilitarian Perspective

Regarding the shocking photo "The Starving Sudan," we can present a thought-provoking analysis from a **utilitarian** standpoint: **not rescuing the starving child** actually aligns better with the utilitarian principle of maximizing happiness. The core of utilitarianism lies in **maximizing overall happiness**, so in this case, we must strike a balance between **professional duty** and **moral responsibility**.

The photographer's duty is to reveal the brutal realities of war and famine through their work, thus raising global awareness about these issues. By doing so, public consciousness is awakened, leading to more aid, which indirectly saves more lives. Let's imagine that the photographer had put down their camera to save the child, but did not capture the photo. Would this choice cause the world to overlook the famine crisis in Sudan? Could this reduce international aid and result in more deaths due to hunger? While the child would have been saved at that moment, what about the children who remain unnoticed?

For this photo, what lies behind it is not only the fate of one child but the survival hopes of **millions**. In this ethical dilemma, **utilitarianism** emphasizes the conflict between long-term benefits and short-term emotional impulses. The ultimate goal is to **maximize overall happiness**, and only by doing so can we truly change the fate of more people.

The Ethical Basis for Our Decisions

YANG Chenchen



- **Definition:**

Utilitarianism, also known as consequentialism, the belief that actions are valued for the results they produce, **i.e., they should be aimed at the greatest good for the greatest number of people.**

- **Application Analysis:**

- ✓ Broader Impact: The photo taken by Kevin Carter managed to win a Pulitzer prize and drew widespread global attention to the famine in Sudan, prompting the international community to take action to bring aid to Sudan.
- ✓ Immediate aid: However, Carter did not immediately aid the little girl at the time the photo was taken, leading to an ethical debate about whether he should “take a picture or rescue”.

- **Trade-off:**

Carter's decision can be viewed as sacrificing an immediate, small-scale good (direct aid to the little girl) for the sake of achieving a greater good (i.e., attracting global attention and bringing long-term aid).

- **Conclusion:**

From a utilitarian perspective, Carter's decision, although controversial, may be seen as a sacrifice for the greater public good.

Deontology (Kantianism)

5 The Ethical Basis for Our Decisions



- **Definition:**

Deontology, which emphasizes an ethics based on responsibility and the belief that the individual must not be used merely as a means to an end.

- **Application Analysis:**

- ✓ Moral obligation: according to Deontology, carter has a moral obligation to help the little girl who is suffering and should not leave her alone simply to take a picture or win an award.
- ✓ Human dignity: Deontology emphasizes the dignity and worth of the human person, arguing that each person should be viewed as an end in itself, not as a means to another end.

- **Critique:**

Carter's decision is seen as a violation of this principle because he did not fulfill his moral obligation to help the little girl.

- **Conclusion:**

Carter's decision is unacceptable because it violates human dignity and moral obligation.



- **Definition:**

Virtue ethics is concerned with an individual's moral character and virtues, **arguing that a person's behavior should be driven by his or her intrinsic qualities.**

- **Application Analysis:**

- ✓ Journalist's Moral Character: Carter's decision reflects his moral character and values. Even though he won the award, his behavior raises questions about his moral character.
- ✓ Responsibility and Compassion: Virtue ethics emphasizes the virtues of responsibility and compassion. Whether Carter showed enough compassion and responsibility in taking the photographs is a question worth exploring.

- **Personal Growth and Reflection:**

Virtue ethics also encourages personal reflection and growth. Carter's suicide after the incident may reflect his inner struggle and pain, as well as his deep reflection on his behavior.

- **Conclusion:**

Carter's decision not only affected his professional career, but also profoundly affected his personal character and inner world. This incident reminds us that as journalists and citizens, we should take social responsibility and pay attention to human dignity and value.

Conclusion: Towards Ethical Journalism

JIANG Juanyuan



The role of journalists: balancing professional responsibility and human dignity.

- Journalists must provide timely, accurate news while upholding moral obligations to human dignity.
- Conflict arises between delivering impactful stories and respecting the individuals involved.
- Ethical journalism requires careful consideration of how reporting affects both public perception and those directly impacted.



Three ethical choices: action, inaction, and finding balance.

- Action: Prioritize **reporting** to **raise awareness**, but **at the cost** of immediate aid to individuals
- Inaction: Directly **assist those in need**, but risk losing the opportunity to highlight larger societal issues.
- Balance: Combine intervention with journalism to **ethically report** while considering broader and immediate consequences.



Navigating Ethical Complexities

- Rise of multimedia platforms → complicated ethical decision-making.
- **Balancing / Compromise?**
- Balancing Utilitarian goals of maximizing societal impact (e.g., raising awareness) with Deontological duties to uphold truth and individual rights, even when speed and impact are at stake.

New Media, New Responsibilities

- Increased pressure to produce impactful, shareable content while maintaining ethical standards.
- The role of journalists in **combating misinformation** and **maintaining public trust**.

Fostering Dialogue and Ethical Awareness

- Collaboration between practitioner and the public to uphold truth and integrity.
- Open dialogue between journalists, media organizations, and the public.

Thank you!



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