

ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE ANALYSIS OF PERSUASION

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Abstract: *The work that we propose is an analysis of the phenomenon of persuasion in order to determine the moral responsibilities of persons involved in an action of persuasion. As a form of human behavior, persuasion always contains potential moral problems as it requires conscious choices about the proposed objectives and the means used to achieve them rhetorical and implies necessarily a potential judge that can be persuasive agent, receiver or an independent observer. The moral value of a persuasive instance is estimated differently by persuasive agent and persuadee recipient, depending on the ethical standards they use. In this respect, the present study aims to bring some clarification on: the origin of ethical responsibility of the person who persuades, and the one that is persuasive; moral obligations incumbent upon the person who persuades, and the persuadee; ways to support appropriate ethical standards of persuasion.*

Keywords: *ethical standards, persuasion, persuasive instance.*

Introduction

In recent years, public space is increasingly more discussion on the issue of moral aspect of public and private life of political leaders or those who hold important public positions. They most often highlighted the moral degradation of behavior of people in positions of public or private responsibility. This phenomenon is associated with the idea that people today are not as honest and moral as once.

The evaluation of concepts of honesty and morality is achieved through the report speech - action. An important role in the interpretation of this report is to understand the phenomenon of persuasion. Persuasion as a form of human behavior always contains potential moral problems because it requires conscious choices of the objectives and the rhetorical means used to achieve them and implies necessarily a potential judge (which may be persuasive agent, receiver or an independent observer). Ethical issues focus on value judgments on the different degrees of correctness and incorrectness, goodness and evil in the conduct of that persuades. The moral value of a persuasive instance is estimated differently by persuasive agent (who persuades) and persuadee recipient (who is persuading), depending on the ethical standards that they use¹. For the intention that wants to persuade transform an act of communication in persuasion, and it may be materialize either the effect of the system at the receiver, due to the position of power and influence enjoyed by those who seek to persuade, or deliberate persuasion with the person who maliciously intended to persuade². In the first situation persuasion is limited by normal system operation and the receptor of persuasion plays an important role in active participation in the process of persuasion. In the case of the two situations require remedy the ethical responsibility that should uphold who wants to persuade³.

So, persuasive agents and persuadee recipients have a duty to support the appropriate ethical standards of persuasion, to encourage freedom of expression and research and promote fairness in public debate as a prerequisite of a democratic decision-making.

Ethical responsibility in persuasion

Ethical responsibilities of persons that persuades, named persuasive agents, originates in the status or the social position acquired or granted, in the duties undertaken by them (promises, solemn commitments, agreements) or in the consequences (effects) of communication on behalf of others⁴. The responsibility includes as elements the achievement of tasks and obligations. A communication charge, both as it regards the communicator and the one who receives the information, is that which is based on conscious and deliberate judgment. Report a liability assumed to carefully analyze requests, thoroughly assess the likely consequences and to weigh lucid relevant values.

One of the most common in the moral evaluation of communication is the assigning an agent's intentions who wants to persuade, "for any moral philosophy explicitly or implicitly provides at least a partial conceptual analysis of the relationship between a subject and causes, motives, intentions and his actions, so in general assumption that these concepts are embodied, or at least may exist in the real social world⁵. Furthermore, assuming intentionality of persuasion process is par excellence a moral decision⁶. In this respect, the question that arises is whether the agent has made use of persuasive content or some certain techniques intentionally and knowingly. For most people, the deliberate use of reprehensible tactics interpreted as lacking morality and draws condemnation⁷.

When talking about the one who persuades it should be noted that in argumentative and persuasive situations, this has a moral obligation to check the validity of the evidence and arguments before presenting them to others. A persuasive agent who has honest intentions can use immoral strategies, but the sincerity of intent does not absolve the persuasive agent of moral responsibility for the means employed and the resulting consequences. For the core moral construction in terms of Bauman is the responsibility⁸. For instance, we can't ignore the ethical assessment of actions taken by Adolf Hitler, even if his countrymen have considered him honest.

If we relate to the issue of morality when it comes to adjusting to the public, it must be stressed that most persuasive agents seek to ensure a positive reaction from the receivers. In order to ensure positive reaction, some persuasive agents adapt to such an extent that the audience gradually closing down their ideas; they get to say what the public wants to hear, and they do not take account of their beliefs. It is ideal that persuasive agents to determine which point to retain their own ideas and their own form and how it changed to have maximum impact on the audience⁹.

Responsibilities of receivers of persuasion

In relation to persuade people we can say that they have a limited liability unless we perceive them as passive, inert, simple receptacles that accept uncritically and without discernment the ideas and the arguments. However, most often, a person who is persuaded can't be described as follows. Therefore, persuasion should be interpreted as a transaction in which the agent persuasive and the patient persuaded have a mutual responsibility: to actively participate in the process. Ch. Larson believes that the image of persuaded as active factors assume more responsibilities, which are captured best by the expressions: adequate feedback and moderate skepticism¹⁰.

The moderate skepticism is a balanced position between the temperate credulous attitude and dogmatic attitude, both undesirable. The persuaded receiver must realize that a full understanding of the agent persuasive message means

¹ Charles U. Larson, *Persuasiunea. Receptare și responsabilitate*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2003, pp. 43 – 44.

² Stănciugelu, Irina, *Măștile comunicării. De la etică la manipulare și înapoi*, Editura, p. 7.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Charles U. Larson, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁵ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *Tratat de morală. După virtute*, Editura Editura Humanitas, București, 1998, p. 50.

⁶ Stănciugelu, Irina, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁷ Charles U. Larson, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁸ Bauman, Zygmunt, *Etica postmodernă*, Editura Amarcord, 2000.

⁹ Charles U. Larson, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 - 46.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

understanding and if the latter wants to impose authoritatively own ethical standards. Only after the receiver has clearly understood the ideas of who wants to persuade, it can assess with discernment the morality of persuasive strategies and objectives of its.

Judge a message as false and immoral just because it provenance from a source compromised and before direct estimate in an act of making a decision is not a good solution. If there is rejection message must occur after being evaluated. "However, if the techniques of persuasion improve or undermine the trust and confidence necessary to make accurate public decision, they can be sanctioned as unethical"¹¹.

The adequate feedback requires a relationship that reflects adequately and honest the level on understanding, the opinion, the feelings and the reasoning. Such a reaction, which may indicate agreement, approval or disagreement, can be transmitted through both verbal and the nonverbal language. Thus, facial expressions, gestures, posture, attitude, questions, statements are ways that who feels persuaded can answer to the emitter of the message that it receives to support their position in relation to it. The receiver has to decide on the intensity and type of feedback appropriate to a theme, to audience and to the persuasive context¹².

The adequate feedback requires also avoid of monopolization of discussion with the intention of prevent others to express their opinions, avoid "verbal attacks below the belt" in order to gain an unfair advantage in knowing the psychological weaknesses points of the interlocutor, avoid storage and accumulation of numerous dissatisfaction reasons, which by their reproaching to overwhelm the others, avoidance of some problems and arguments irrelevant or trivial just to gain an advantage.

Ch. Larson identifies a number of tools that persuaded receiver, called and persuaded patient, at its disposal to evaluate the ethical use of language by one who persuades (such as metaphor, ambiguity) or that the evidence and reasoning that he uses.

This is the so-called perspectives that can be used to estimate the ethics of persuasion techniques. In assessing the ethics of persuasion techniques used by a communicator can use one of the following ethical perspective or a combination of this: religious perspectives, perspectives of human nature, political perspectives, situational perspectives, legal perspectives and dialogical perspectives.

These perspectives can be used to estimate also the ethics of psychological techniques, such as appealing to the values and needs, stimulating and resolving dissonance and imbalances, the use of myths and cultural images well known, persuasive tactics of campaigns and social movements¹³.

The religious perspectives based on religious criteria that can be used to assess ethical of persuasion. They come from the moral principles and from the prohibitions embodied in the ideology and in the sacred literature of various religions. For example, the Bible forbids lying, slander and false testimony; Taoist religion emphasizes the role of empathy and intuition instead of reason or logic as the way to truth¹⁴. They can be used for a moral evaluation of persuasive communication.

The perspectives of human nature identify unique characteristics of human nature, which can be employed as standards for judging the ethical persuasion. These features include: human individual capacity to reason, to create and use symbols, to appreciative mutual understanding and to make value judgments. Thus, it is assumed that everyone has unique human attributes worthy of being promoted through communication, regardless of the political, religious or cultural context in which it occurs. These perspectives supposed to formulate questions about the qualities which give a man defining human nature. From this point of view, are considered unethical the techniques that dehumanizes, that make a

person less human. In this regard, A. MacIntyre spoke of the subjective basis from which any ethical system must go to work, which means not taking it because of rules imposed, but within a creed or a moral propensities¹⁵.

MacIntyre believes that at the center of any ethical system, is the concept of virtue, which is a trait of character of a man, so a moral virtue. Likewise, J. Oakley and D. Cocking talked about an ethics of virtue. Thus, according to the concept developed by J. Oakley and D. Cocking a moral action is an action that is correct and good and meets three conditions, namely: it is correct if and only if a virtuous agent would act the same in the given circumstances; a good action is correct, while the correct action is not necessarily better; good actions lead to ownership by the virtues they carry some specific¹⁶.

As regards the first condition, namely to establish the correctness of an action based on virtual agent that acts in the same way in the given circumstances, we identify the primacy of nature in justification of right action. The second condition, a good action are correct, while the correct action is not necessarily good, is based on Aristotelian distinction between good deliberation and skill, which involves human good first estimate before deciding what is good for an individual or more in a given situation. The third condition of an action based on an ethic of virtue requires the acquisition of specific virtues of the one who made such a move, which means that virtues must be seen as intrinsic goods of human action, that they must be considered valuable in intrinsic, not instrumental, that realization of such action can only to put in act a virtue and not only as a means to promote or get another one.

Political perspectives concerns to the default or explicit values and accepted procedures as very important for the development and health of a certain political and governmental system¹⁷. These include identifying core values for a political system and their use in assessing ethical means and goals within that system. It is assumed that any public communication should contribute to achieving those values and different political systems embody different values that lead to different ethical conclusions. In this context, values and processes considered essential for the healthy functioning of a political system is the benchmark of ethical examination of persuasion. Among the most important values and processes used in this regard include: increasing the capacity of citizens to make rational decisions; their access to public communication channels, to relevant and accurate information on public issues; increasing freedom of choice; tolerance of nonconformity in presenting the motivations and consequences.

The situational perspectives implies the contextual factors relevant at the ethical evaluation, such as: the role or function of that persuades the public; expectations of the receivers on issues such as the adequacy and reasonableness; awareness of the receiver about techniques used by the who persuades; objectives and values their receptors; urgency of implementing the proposals they want to persuade; ethical standards of receptor communication¹⁸.

On a situational radical perspective, it can be argued that, in a time of crisis, a recognized leader has the task to gather supporters and thus can make use of emotional appeals that prevent the receptor to take a decision only after reasoning and reflection. Also, it can be argued that a person who persuades ethically uses techniques such as allusion, guilt by association and unfounded calumnies as long as receptors recognize and agree with these methods¹⁹.

The legal perspectives, involves the idea that an illegal human behavior is also immoral. In this case the terms "legal" and "moral" are considered synonymous. Although such an approach seems to allow simple decisions ethically, we must bear in mind that the assessment of communication skills as moral or not is based on the laws and regulations in force,

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ MacIntyre, Alaisdar, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

¹⁶ Oakley, Justin & Cocking, Dean, *Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 9 - 21.

¹⁷ Charles U. Larson, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 51 - 52.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

depending on the area in which we relate. The advertising is governed by certain ethical rules governing the activities carried out in this area or can be used criteria of state law when referring to moral or immoral character of a particular message, which may include issues such as obscenity, pornography, libel, gossip²⁰. Moreover, people prefer to apply ethical standards of communication pathways general consensus, social pressure or formal ethical codes, but coerced. We must emphasize this and that very few ethical standards of communication can be regulated by government laws.

A special problem is represented by the controversies related to communication through the Internet and World Wide Web, which illustrates not only the opposition between freedom of expression and responsibility, but also the pressure to address legally ethics. The question in this regard is that of freedom to describe anything without restriction through the World Wide Web and the Internet, which brings a space free from any control, where the problem of freedom and responsibility is difficult to monitor.

Dialogical perspectives define communication as dialogue, not monologue, arguing that the position of each participant in an act of communication to others is its ethical level index. Some attitudes, compared to others, are regarded as more humane, humanitarian, facilitating personal fulfillment. Communication as a form of dialogue is characterized by attitudes such as: honesty, caring for each other's welfare and improvement, confidence, naturalness, lack of prejudice, equality, mutual respect, empathy, humility, honesty, non-manipulative intentions, encouraging free expression and acceptance others as individuals, despite differences of opinion and behavior. This type of communication is considered to be based on an ethical attitude. Instead, communication as a form of monologue is marked by features such as: disappointment, sense of superiority, mining, dogmatism, domination, insincerity, absurd claims, megalomania, possessiveness, arrogance, self-protection excessive, considering the other as a simple object that can be manipulated. As a result, a monologue attitude in communication is considered unethical to receptors. If of persuasion, analysis and presentation techniques of agent persuasive communication through dialogue or monologue its attitude determines the degree of moral in persuasion action.

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

Conclusion

Techniques of communication used to determine a person to adopt certain attitudes or behaviors, persuasion, whether rational or emotional nature, is always a deliberateness character be it about one who wants to persuade, namely persuade agent, whether it is one that is persuaded, namely persuaded patient.

The intentional nature of persuasion determines responsibility of persuades, but also of persuaded, each side of persuasion must take the consequences of this process.

Persuasion always involve moral issues as potential requires conscious choices about the objectives and rhetorical means used to achieve them and also a potential evaluator, that can be persuasive agent, the persuaded patient or an independent observer of the persuasion action.

The moral responsibility of any act persuasively lies with both the persuasive agent and the persuaded patient both have a duty to support appropriate ethical standards of persuasion.

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