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### What's This I Hear About Ethics in the Fourth Estate?

Is media/journalism ethics an oxymoron? Most teachers of practical or applied ethics are familiar with such a question; they've heard it or had it posed to them, seriously or as a joke, about business ethics. It is sad that it should arise in the context of discussions of the fourth estate. Yet, given the conduct of print and broadcast media in the recent past, it is hardly surprising that it does.

As in the more familiar case of business ethics, it seems likely that a description or (especially) an explanation of perceived misconduct would include an indication of why the question seems appropriate. Interestingly, one reasonable hypothesis is that much of what is found ethically suspect in the conduct of print and broadcast media is tied to a shift in the direction of a business orientation, toward entertaining rather than truly informing in television news, for instance. If that is right, what one says in addressing the question whether (or accusation that) business ethics is an oxymoron might be relevant in this connection too. However, I think there is a more promising approach: we should take seriously journalism's claim to be a *profession* and with it, the implication that its activities are governed by practice-specific norms.

Starting with the idea that journalism is a profession I will show that media ethics is not an oxymoron. More important, I will direct attention to two key features of the practice-specific norms that govern journalistic practice, namely (a) the link between their moral authority and the purpose of the profession and (b) the challenge of sustaining that authority, which, in turn, highlights the responsibilities of practitioners. What's true here is true of professions generally. One important upshot of this for teaching ethics across the curriculum is that focusing on media ethics, which is an area of interest and concern for undergraduates regardless of major, there are opportunities for engagement with theoretical *and* practical issues. In closing, I will flag some of the opportunities for theoretical engagement and discuss the ways in which they are connected to issues "on the ground" that may arise in non-ethics courses. The latter will be of special interest to teachers working to integrate ethics into courses that do not have ethics in their title, since, among other things, these teachers are likely to think in terms of "teachable moments."