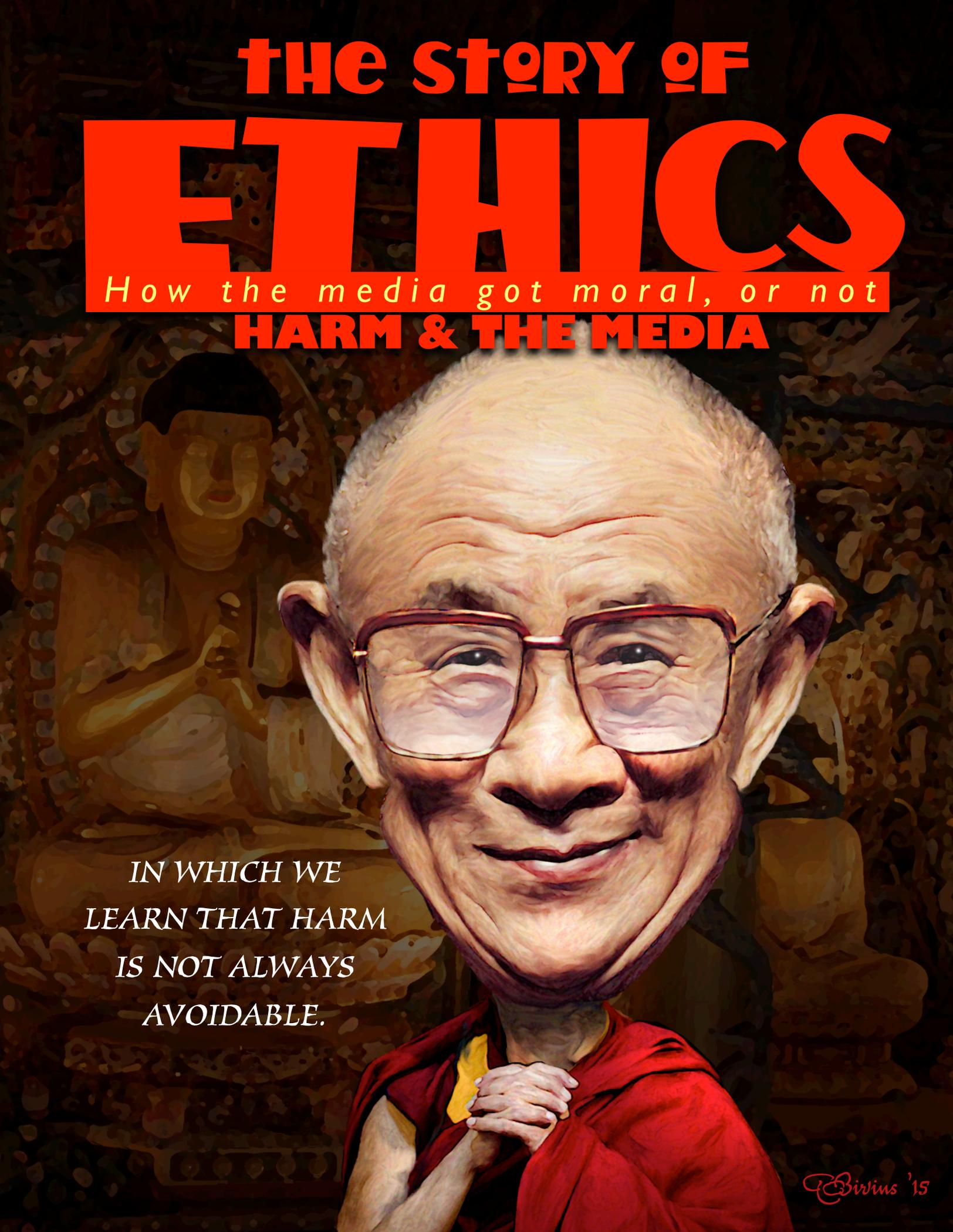


# the story of **ETHICS**

*How the media got moral, or not*  
**HARM & THE MEDIA**



*IN WHICH WE  
LEARN THAT HARM  
IS NOT ALWAYS  
AVOIDABLE.*

# AVOIDING HARM

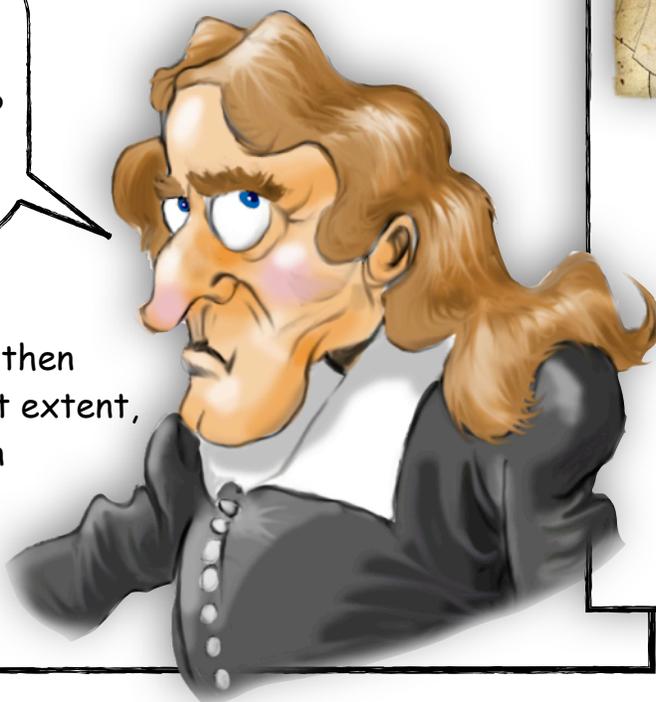
AS FAR BACK AS HIPPOCRATES WE HAVE BEEN ADVISED TO AVOID HARMING OTHER HUMAN BEINGS.

The big question is: Can the **media** operate under a proscription of "do no harm"?

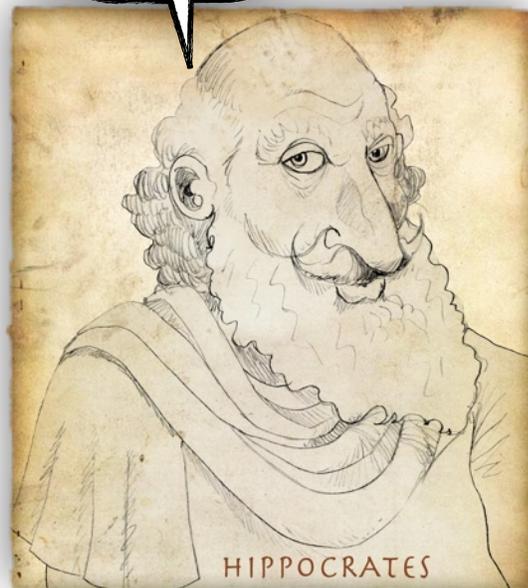
AND, JOHN MILTON ARGUED IN AREOPAGITICA THAT TRUTH WOULD WIN OUT.

YES, BUT I DIDN'T CONTEND THAT NOBODY WOULD GET HURT IN THE PROCESS.

So, the question then becomes: to what extent, if any, is harm an allowable by-product of communication?



FIRST,  
DO NO  
HARM



Hippocrates was an ancient Greek physician, who is referred to as the father of Western medicine in recognition of his lasting contributions to the field as the founder of the Hippocratic School of Medicine, establishing medicine as a profession. The Hippocratic Oath is still administered to physicians today.

- Advertisers regularly harm their competition every time a successful ad results in increased sales for the product being advertised.
- Public relations practitioners harm competing political candidates' chances each time their own candidate moves higher in the polls because of their aggressive campaigning.
- Some type of harm follows from a lot of what journalists produce as news—and, in many cases, that harm is either a necessary by-product or literally unavoidable.

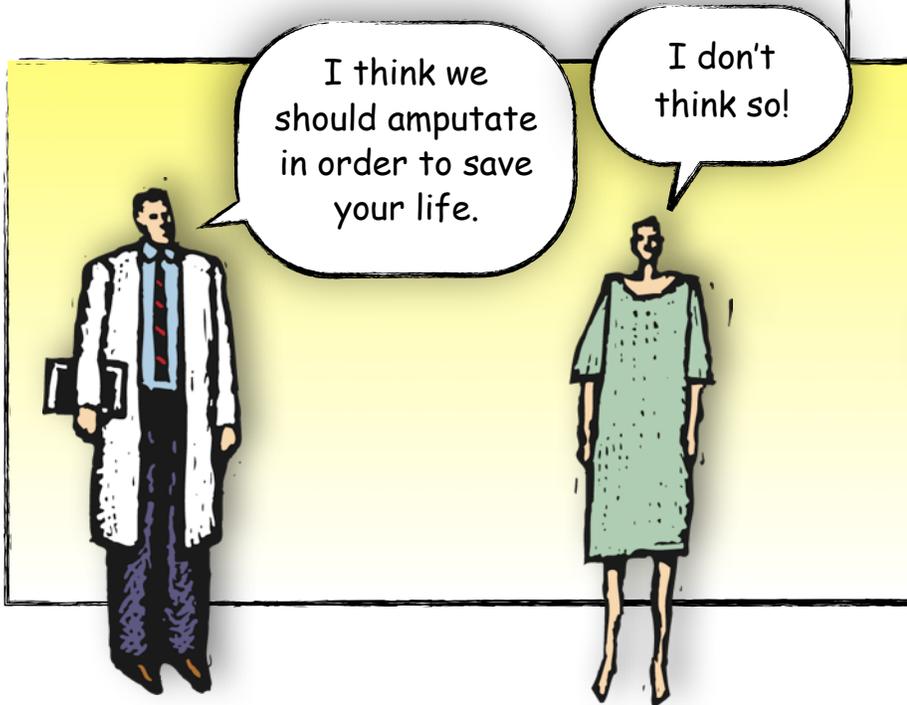
**THE FINAL QUESTION, THEN, IS HOW MUCH OF THAT HARM IS AVOIDABLE RATHER THAN NECESSARY?**

## IF HARM IS DONE IN THE SERVICE OF A GREATER GOOD, THEN IT IS AN ACCEPTABLE SIDE EFFECT.

At least that's the Utilitarian perspective, and that's the perspective most of the media use.

IT'S CERTAINLY THE ONE I USE.

In other professions, harm is a choice of the person being harmed, and they can refuse it.



John Stuart Mill

### IN JOURNALISM THE RISK OF HARM TO A PERSON OR INSTITUTION BEING REPORTED ON

- is rarely disclosed,
- not always evident,
- virtually never refusable,
- and, the potential beneficiary is not the subject of the story who will suffer the harm—it is generally the public.

## SO, WHAT IS HARM ANYWAY?

### HARM INVOLVES:

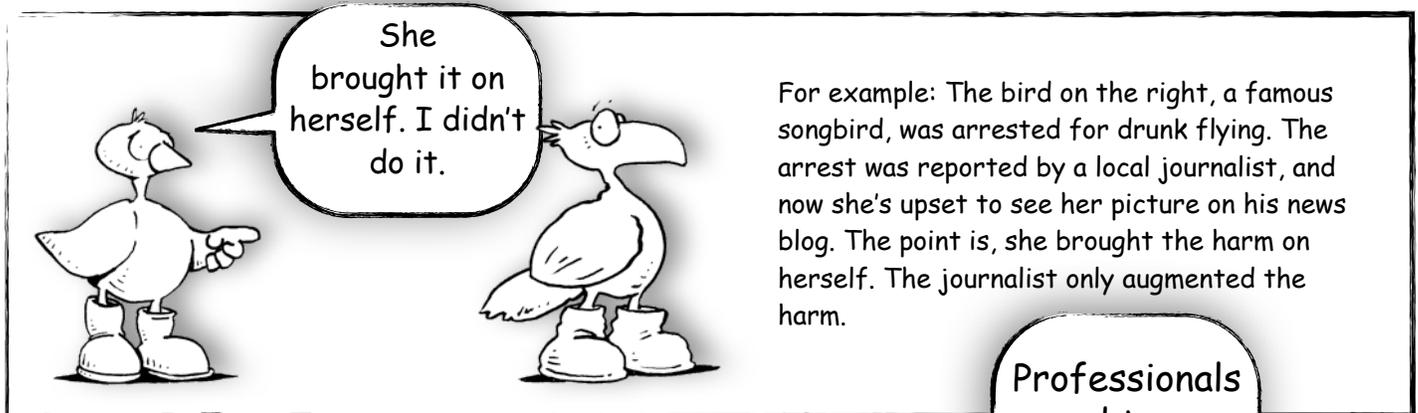
thwarting, defeating or setting back an interest including: property, privacy, confidentiality, friendship, reputation, health and career.



"Thwart" is the sound my arrow makes when it strikes the target.

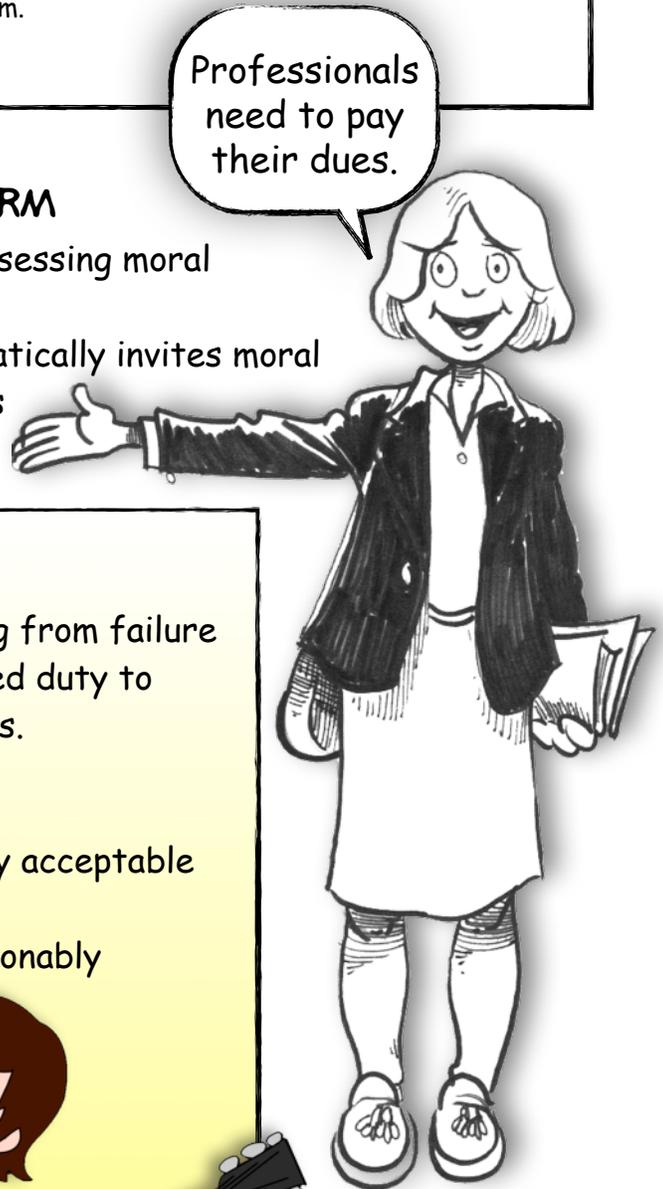
**HOWEVER, MEDIA PROFESSIONALS NEED TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN CAUSAL AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY**

- Does the action cause the harm or does it only augment an already present harm? (Did person you bring it on herself?) This is called **CAUSAL HARM**.



**PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND HARM**

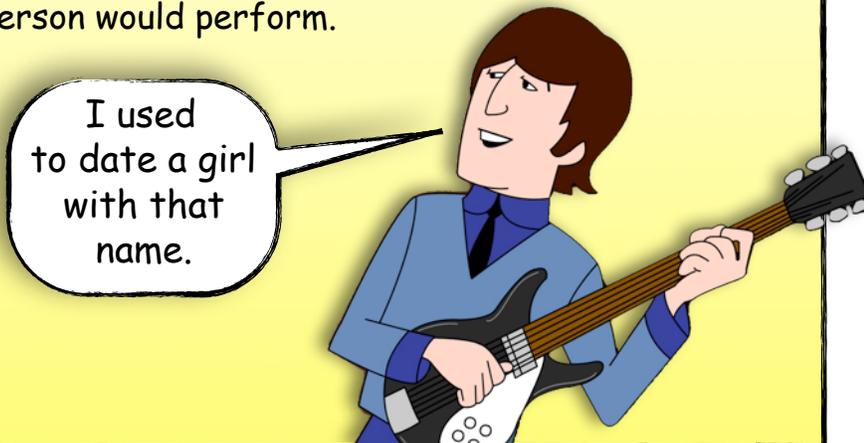
- Taking **DUE CARE** is a central concept for assessing moral responsibility for harmful outcomes.
- Anyone who is not sufficiently careful automatically invites moral blame as well as legal penalty for omissions as well as for actions.



*TO BE MORALLY BLAMEWORTHY,*  
a harm must be caused by carelessness resulting from failure to discharge a socially, legally, or morally imposed duty to take care or to behave reasonably toward others.

**TWO TESTS OF REASONABLENESS**

- Professionals should conform to the minimally acceptable standards practiced in the profession.
- They should perform only actions that a reasonably prudent person would perform.





NEGLIGENCE OR "CARELESS" ACTION CAN BE ANALYZED IN TERMS OF THE FOLLOWING ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS:

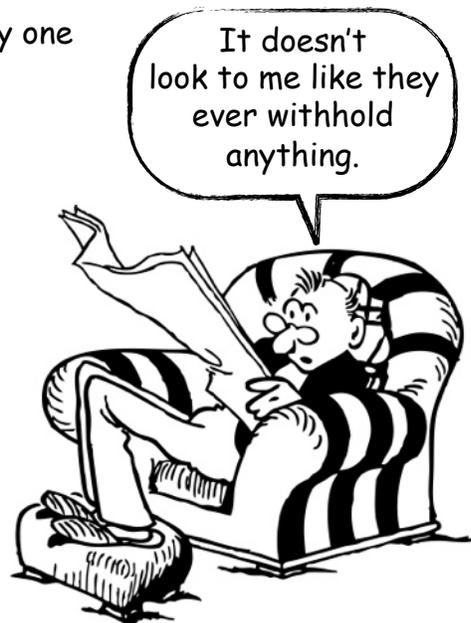
- an established duty to the affected party must exist;
- someone must breach that duty;
- the affected party must experience a harm; and
- this harm must be caused by the breach of duty.



**Professional negligence**, or **malpractice**, is an instance in which professional standards of care have been developed for persons possessing or claiming special knowledge, expertise, or skill, and in which those standards have been violated.

THE SPECIAL LIBERTIES GRANTED THE PRESS ARE BASED ON THE EXPECTATION THAT IT WILL PROVIDE PUBLIC BENEFITS.

- The implicit contract between press and society, on which the privileges of the press are based, is that the press is to provide adequate information for readers or viewers, not only about political affairs but in other spheres as well.
- However, not everyone's interests must be served by any one journalist's efforts, or even by the efforts of any one journalistic institution.
- To attempt to carefully balance benefits against harms in every story would place an impossible burden on reporters and editors.



FOR JOURNALISTS, A CENTRAL QUESTION IN ANY PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING ABOUT WHETHER TO WITHHOLD PUBLICATION WILL ALWAYS BE:

How much does the public need the information and how successfully does that need compete with the principle that we should avoid the harm that would result from its publication?

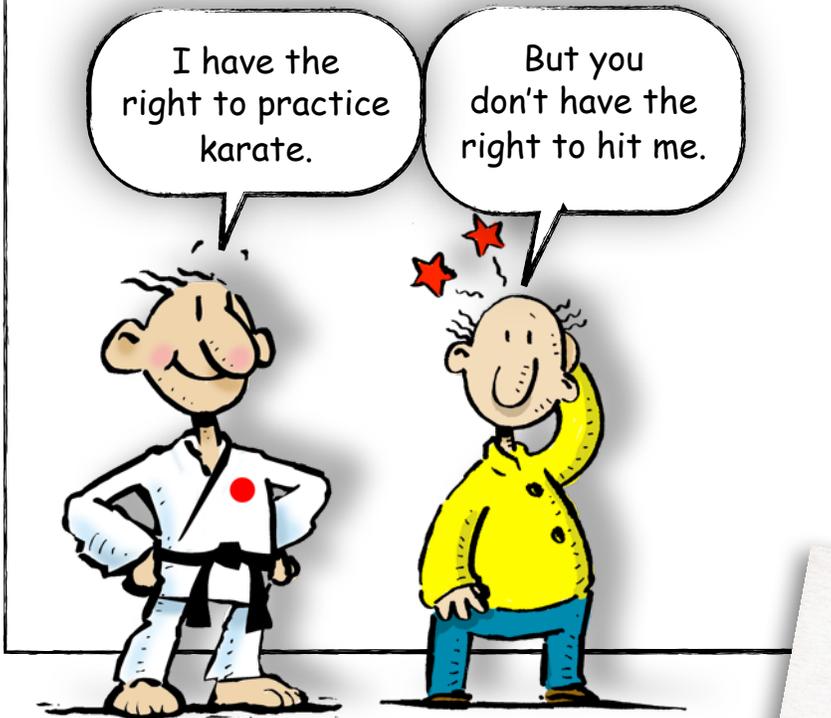
# AND FOR ALL MEDIA, THERE'S ALWAYS THE "HARM PRINCIPAL"

## JOHN STUART MILL'S "HARM PRINCIPLE"

The Harm Principle says that a person's liberty may justifiably be restricted to prevent harm that the person's actions would cause to others.

WHEN USING THE HARM PRINCIPLE, TRY THE FOLLOWING EXERCISE:

- Ask yourself whether the "good" brought about by your action is outweighed by the potential harm that might be done to anyone?
- What kind of harm is it, and how serious?
- Is any of the harm brought about by anyone other than the moral agent (you)?



*"There are laws to protect the freedom of the press's speech, but none that are worth anything to protect the people from the press."*

*Mark Twain*

