

## Infoética: El periodismo liberado de lo políticamente correcto [Journalistic Ethics: Journalism Freed from Political Correctness]

by Gabriel Galdón López, Madrid, Ediciones CEU, 2019, 336 pp., €19, ISBN 978-8417385262

Norberto González Gaitano

To cite this article: Norberto González Gaitano (2021) Infoética: El periodismo liberado de lo políticamente correcto [Journalistic Ethics: Journalism Freed from Political Correctness], Church, Communication and Culture, 6:1, 139-142, DOI: [10.1080/23753234.2021.1885985](https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2021.1885985)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2021.1885985>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 26 Apr 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 91



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



BOOK REVIEW



**Infoética: El periodismo liberado de lo políticamente correcto [Journalistic Ethics: Journalism Freed from Political Correctness]**, by Gabriel Galdón López, Madrid, Ediciones CEU, 2019, 336 pp., €19, ISBN 978-8417385262

From informative essays to bold academic studies, books denouncing the diseases of journalism are a swarm, and a recurring one at that. It is not difficult to detect an illness, especially if it has visible effects. But few explain the causes. Few go beyond describing the symptoms to actually diagnose the disease; although such works exist, they usually enjoy less editorial and public success, even in the academic world. Books that propose a cure for the ailment, or ailments, are rare indeed. It is already a miracle if the recovery plan is accepted with no argument, or with only reasonable debate.

The author Gabriel Galdón López has gone through the stages just outlined. He has been on this path of intellectual and educational outreach for thirty years, ever since he began his career as a young professor of Journalistic Documentation at the University of Navarra in Spain, which in 1958 was the first in Europe to promote journalistic studies at the university level, half a century after the University of Missouri at Columbia did so in the United States in 1907. Galdón has continued to teach at other Spanish universities, both public (La Laguna, Tenerife) and private (Universidad Europea and CEU San Pablo, both in Madrid). He has lectured about his intuitions and convictions—passionate conviction—in many academic forums, especially in the Latin world (Portugal, Italy, Argentina, etc.). The first fruit of this effort at integral diagnosis and at outlining a cure was his work *Desinformación. Métodos, aspectos y soluciones [Disinformation: Methods, Aspects, and Solutions]* (López (1994) 2006). This book has been relatively successful in the academic sphere, which is unusual for scholarly books on journalism and/or communication: the experience that these books deal with is so fleeting that any science, or at least knowledge that comes out of that ever-changing experience becomes outdated almost immediately! To say nothing of whether the technological changes are epic – or are at least presented as such. The Internet has not poked holes in Galdón’s diagnosis; on the contrary, it has shown it to be prophetic; that is to say, the book anticipated these times. This is because the Internet has simply multiplied exponentially the ills plaguing journalism. And Galdón’s denunciation, which came before the Internet, had gotten to the very bottom of the matter: its author had done all his documentation homework. The book was soon translated into Italian (*Informazione e disinformazione. Il metodo nel giornalismo*, published by Armando, Rome, 1999), and the first edition quickly sold out, so now it is printed ‘on demand’ with another publishing house which recovers valuable books that are already sold out (Fontana de Trevi). Shortly thereafter it was published in Portuguese with the title *Desinformação e Os Limites da Informação* (published by Folhas e Letras in 2003).

I have had the opportunity to verify the persuasive power of the book with communications students from very diverse cultural traditions (India, the United States, English- and French-speaking African countries, Philippines, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Romania, and other Eastern European countries, in addition to the culturally Latin countries already mentioned). I require this book as mandatory reading in my course, *Etica della comunicazione* (Ethics of Communication), since it is available in Italian. I discuss it with each one of my students in an oral exam. None of them have been indifferent. Many of them have described it as the most enlightening book they read during their communication studies.

What then, in my opinion, does this new book on journalistic ethics, *Infoetica*, add to its successful predecessor?

First, it reiterates the diagnosis of thirty years ago, with less supporting scholarship – which was more necessary back then – eliminating the most dated assessments and emphasizing what time has reinforced. I shall briefly summarize the proven findings, even though I do not hesitate to advise the readers of this review to go back and read the first book.

First of all, it must be said that the book is not a repetition of what was already said in the prior one, although it does echo a good deal of what has already been discussed, and presents it with a view that is not new but is more refined and includes updated examples.

In the first part, and after dismantling the fallacy of objectivism and its companion, alleged neutrality, we see the true characteristics of ‘objectivist’ journalism, which include: superficiality; disorientation due to a surplus of meaningless news; the omission of what is essential; and the sacralization of opinion. The deleterious effects on society and culture are explained once again: a) the spiral of silence (an effect demonstrated well by Noelle-Neumann and confirmed by a broad subsequent investigation), a theory now better incorporated into Galdón’s description; b) ideological manipulation, the description of which includes added summaries of new works and authors that support the same denunciation; and c) what is more serious, the credulity of a society that is ignorant of being manipulated or of being insufficiently informed.

On this final point, and as a contrast to inspire hope, it is good to point out that the Covid-19 epidemic has suddenly awakened the dormant critical consciousness of many readers (Belardinelli and Gili 2020). Galdón’s book was written before the pandemic. However, there are other earlier indications of the awakening of a critical consciousness in the face of the growing perception that the traditional media are beholden to ideology and do not reflect the social reality (Gaitano 2017); and the recent and reliable survey, from the Gallup and Knight Foundation, *American Views 2020: Trust, Media and Democracy*, which states that 49% of Americans see ‘a great deal of bias’ in the news media, a percentage that has grown from the 45% who saw it that way in 2017. European journalism does not fare any better – as revealed by the latest Edelman study on citizens’ trust in the media during the pandemic, journalists are the least reliable source (Ferraresi 2020).

The attempts to correct *objectivist* journalism that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century are summarized in a brief section in the first part of the book, pp. 125-151 (they comprised the second part of the book *Desinformación*: pp. 85-130). Inevitable mentions of subsequent attempts, which were even more fleeting (*public journalism*, for example), have also been added. It confirms that journalism needs nouns, not adjectives such as ‘civic’ journalism, ‘investigative’ journalism, etc. Journalism itself involves being civic, investigative, etc.

The most consistent, and most innovative, portion of the new book consists in the second and third parts. There is a quote from Ratzinger (p. 152), which the author references several times, that in my view summarizes the purpose of those chapters and of the whole book: ‘Journalism only makes sense if it is good to know the truth. It can only be an effective profession if there is a truth that is good. In that case it is right and necessary to help the truth manifest itself. The fundamental trust in the existence of the good and the need to contribute to its spread does not impede the journalist’s work; it is, rather, the only thing that makes it possible: it must be the pillar of an authentic journalistic ethos’ (our translation).

The justification of this axiom is the subject of Chapter 5, with the support of three modern thinkers specifically chosen by the author to the exclusion of the many others he could have cited to support that premise: Chesterton, John Paul II, and Ratzinger. For the

author, they are three points of light that help us to have another, better-informed look at the human reality in its totality, in order to return to ‘wisdom.’ Analyzing these anthropological presuppositions in their application to journalism leads him again to propose a definition of journalism, of its nature and purpose, which was already in the previous book but is now more refined: ‘Journalism must be configured as a prudential knowledge that consists in adequate, periodic, and medial communication of knowledge synthesized in true, meaningful, and clear messages on current or updated human realities which are good to spread in order to contribute to the freedom and solidarity of individuals in relation to the common good’ (our translation).

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 elaborate on the meaning of this rich definition in detail, so that it does not remain just a lovely declaration of unattainable or utopian principles. This entails a description of the procession of intellectual and moral virtues required for the exercise of such a noble and committed profession. The role of the documentation in this task is clearly explained, in a way that is more succinct and better linked to the rest of the work as it was in *Desinformación*.

Chapter 9, called ‘Journalists, Media, and Quixotic Adventures’ is an appeal to Catholic journalists, or those who call themselves such, to reflect on what faith adds to these challenges, which are common to all journalists. The secular reader should not think that this *plus* required of some is the ‘hidden motive’ of the book, finally revealed. The author is transparent from the very beginning. Galdón has proven that he knows very well how to combine his Christian faith with reason, showing the consistency of the two when its light is applied to a practical, prudential field, such as journalism. And he does not take anything away from either one.

Having presented the book along with relevant documentation about its predecessor – I hope honestly and in a good, meaningful summary – I now have some minor critical observations.

The book suffers from a lack of updated international journalistic bibliography, which by contrast was exhaustive in the earlier version. The majority of the most recent works cited are from the Spanish-speaking world, as are the examples of journalistic articles worthy of reproduction (in full, according to Galdón), with a few exceptions.

No mention is made of current, non-Spanish journalistic initiatives that have tried – or are trying – to conduct journalism outside of the traditional media that have already arisen in the digital world. I shall point out some, even if their effective achievements can be discussed: *Pro Publica* and *Politico*.

The author uses adjectives of praise that could be embarrassing to the authors or works that he approves – perhaps unjustly in my case – and that may deter the reader.

There are often lists of summaries of *truths* that are suspended with calls for further explanations, or deferred *sine die* because ‘this is not the time to elaborate on them,’ giving the impression of vanishing points for how much could be said on the subject, as if the reader already knew what follows or could logically deduce it on his or her own.

These minor drawbacks do not detract from the strength of the arguments themselves (although they may detract from their persuasive efficacy) and certainly not from the courage and boldness of this book.

As a minor detail, and in defense of a deceased author – and a common colleague – who is insufficiently cited with regard to his most original contribution (which corroborates what Galdón argues), I would like to add something in this time during which the question of truth in Journalism is again being debated for reasons of the simple power struggle between the big traditional media and the new internet giants (I refer to the debate about ‘post-truth’ and ‘fake news’): It is urgent to *get at the heart of* the question of truth and

journalism at its foundations, if journalism is to be ‘re-established,’ as J. R. Muñoz Torres argues well (Muñoz Torres 2012).

Galdón’s new book is quite necessary in times such as these, in which the aims of the Enlightenment seem weary and disillusioned. The spread of mistrust in reason, with the explosion of relativism and the fallibility of tolerance, along with the re-emergence of strong political populisms, invite humankind to rethink fundamental principles in order to make sense of things.

In a cultural situation so broadly depicted, we need books such as Galdón’s, which relays its foundation in the complementarity of faith and reason, and of truth and communication. Inasmuch as faith enhances reason and reason protects faith from corruption (political abuse, economic gain, and other negative influences), truth prevents communication from being reduced to a mere set of techniques for persuasion – or even manipulation.

## References

- Belardinelli, Sergio, and Guido Gili. 2020. “Fidarsi: Cinque Prove di Fiducia Alla Prova Del Covid 19.” *Mediascapes* 2020 (15): 80–98.
- Ferraresi, Mattia. 2020. “A Trust Test for the Media: How Coverage of the Coronavirus in Italy, Spain, France and Germany Has Impacted Trust in News Outlets.” *Nieman Reports* 74 (2): 12–18.
- Gaitano, Norberto. 2017. “More than a Media System Failure? Reason, Faith and Mercy as Comprehensive Paradigms for Communication.” *Church, Communication and Culture* 2 (1): 1–7.
- López, Gabriel Galdón. (1994) 2006. *Desinformación. Métodos, Aspectos y Soluciones [Disinformation: Methods, Aspects, and Solutions]*. 4th ed. Pamplona: Eunsa.
- Muñoz Torres, J. R. J. R. 2012. “Truth and Objectivity in Journalism: Anatomy of an Endless Misunderstanding.” *Journalism Studies* 2012 (4): 566–582.

Norberto González Gaitano

*Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, School of Church Communications, Rome, Italy*

 [gaitano@pusc.it](mailto:gaitano@pusc.it)

Received 2 February 2021; Accepted 2 February 2021

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.