

Normative theory essay sample

[Government](#), [Capitalism](#)



Normative theories describe an ideal way for a media system to be structured and operated. Most normative theories develop over time.

Normative theories differ in two ways from scientific theories: (1) they are less concerned with specific predictions, and (2) they are less directly tied to systematic, empirical, direct observation. First two normative theories are authoritarianism and libertarianism. Authoritarianism calls for direct regulation of media and media content by the government. An example would be Lasswell and Lippman arguing that the threat of propaganda is such that government technocrats are needed to see that media have good content. Historically the other extreme was in U. S — radical libertarianism or First Amendment absolutism. i. e. free press, no government regulation.

Libertarianism: a. Reaction to authoritarian theory (divinely ordained social order, thus licensing and censorship). b. Justified by belief in “ natural” tendency of people to be guided by conscience, to recognize truth, to recognize and pursue their own best interest. c. Combined with belief that individuals pursuing own self-interest will create a good society.

Milton’s “ self-righting principle” that good arguments win in fair debate and correct the social order. Libertarian approach is the foundation of the U. S. concept of democracy and freedom. In practice, there has always been recognition of limits on freedom of speech necessary to protect other rights, to protect people and society, etc. E. g. libel laws, gag orders, false advertising, child pornography, crying, “ fire” in a crowded theatre. A variant on libertarianism is application of Adam Smith’s ideas of laissez-faire capitalism. In an unregulated marketplace there will be competition that, through the laws of supply and demand (price theory) will lead to an optimal

result. Normative theories of the 20th century Communist model: The party represents the people. Party determines the national goals. The role of media is to proactively support the party in bringing about the communist revolution. Party has the power to censor media content, punish those who violate the standards set by the party.

Social responsibility theory

This emerged out of the libertarian model, which was found to be impractical. A pure economic model was unrealistic. People are not always so intelligent to withstand media manipulations. Government regulation in public utilities provided a model that was applied to media in the FRC (later FCC) in 1927. Stations and the public supported this view of media.

Further, airwaves belong to the public. Broadcasting is not like any other industry. Broadcasters have the responsibility to use their license in public's interest, convenience and necessity. Professionalism for media workers was stressed, and professional schools played a larger role. But this does not always work because professionals are reluctant to censure each other. There are no standards for training and licensing. Media professionals lack independent control over their work.

Violations do not usually have immediate and obvious consequences. (E. g. in Janet Cooke and GM pickup cases no apparent harm was done.) It is possible to have doubt about how well social responsibility theory really functions to meet its goals. There has been relatively little research on how well news production practices, for instance, really serve societal goals.

Development media theory: This model is similar to authoritarianism and

communist models. It advocates media support for an existing government in its attempts to create economic development. Democratic-participant theory: Advocates grass-roots media support for cultural pluralism. As developed in Europe this theory argues that minorities, etc. should be given access to media and allowed to revive their traditional cultures. This, the authors say, might be advantageous in the U. S.