

# The Role of Journalist and the Performance of Journalism: Ethical Lessons From “Fake” News (Seriously)

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□ *Some have suggested that Jon Stewart of The Daily Show with Jon Stewart (TDS) and Stephen Colbert of The Colbert Report (TCR) represent a new kind of journalist. We propose, rather, that Stewart and Colbert are imitators who do not fully inhabit the role of journalist. They are interesting because sometimes they do a better job performing the functions of journalism than journalists themselves. However, Stewart and Colbert do not share journalists' moral commitments. Therefore, their performances are neither motivated nor constrained by these commitments. Using a virtue theory framework, we suggest that this distinction between journalists and their imitators is morally significant because it implies differences in the kinds of excellence these moral agents are pursuing in their work. Rather than evaluating the work of Colbert and Stewart in the role of journalists, we propose analyzing their contributions to media ethics in the role of media critics.*

## Introduction

The Peabody Awards honored *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* for its coverage of the 2004 presidential elections, which was called in tongue-in-cheek fashion “Indecision 2004.” The citation for the award went in part “for its unmatched wit and unorthodox approach in putting the 2004 Presidential Election in perspective without diminishing its importance . . .” (2004). The Peabody Award illustrates how *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* is sometimes conflated with journalism and at other times seen as a detriment to the serious genre of news. Yet Stewart himself steadfastly refuses to take up the label “journalist” and prefers “comic,” as he emphasized in his now-famous appearance on *CNN Crossfire* (Oct. 12, 2004). In fact, on that episode Stewart deflected the label of

journalist back to the hosts and then asked them why, as journalists for CNN, they were not doing a better job serving citizens.<sup>1</sup>

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We propose that the role of journalist entails certain moral commitments that do not bind Stewart and Stephen Colbert of *The Colbert Report*. Therefore, Stewart's and Colbert's performances of news cannot be morally evaluated on the same terms. We will use MacIntyre's (2007) virtue theory as a normative framework to argue that performing the functions of journalism is not sufficient, morally speaking, to fully inhabit the role of journalist—that is, to “live it” or “be it,” rather than just to “act it” or “imitate it.” However, we argue they are making a contribution to media ethics by serving as media critics. Analyzing imitators helps us appreciate both the relationship between moral commitments and performance styles and why, at first glance, imitators may appear to be journalists.

First, we discuss MacIntyre's (2007) theory as an ethical framework for understanding why acting as a journalist is not enough, morally speaking, to be called a journalist. Second, we discuss how the moral commitments journalists make get expressed in journalistic performances. Third, we discuss how Stewart and Colbert use the flawed performances of journalists to criticize journalists' integrity, which is being true to Stewart's and Colbert's commitments as comedians. Fourth, we explore the accountability function of media critics such as Stewart and Colbert. We conclude by discussing some ethical lessons journalists can draw from the criticism of Stewart and Colbert regarding their relationships with audiences and their performances of journalism.

### The Role of Journalist

The question put to us was “who is a journalist?” We think this is a better question to ask than “what is journalism?” The latter encourages us to focus on the skills or activities involved in producing news regardless of context or intention. Clearly, nonjournalists are capable of snapping good pictures, checking facts, and telling good stories. The question is whether it matters who performs such activities. We think it does. They are not the activities of journalists unless they are motivated

by the self-conscious pursuit of excellence *as* a journalist—what MacIntyre (2007) called “the good of a certain kind of life” (p. 190). Excellent journalists demonstrate correspondence between intention and performance—in other words, they have integrity as journalists.

Virtue theory is useful for discussing role morality because it focuses on the achievement of moral excellence in the context of social roles. Roles have moral substance because they involve commitments to certain shared goods, such as knowledge. A role may be defined by participation in cooperative activities known as practices, which serve as the immediate context for the exercise of virtues. Practices often develop disciplines that help participants develop the virtues they need to achieve the practice’s purpose (MacIntyre, 2007). Participants in practices like journalism (Lambeth, 1992) interpret the goods they pursue together through the lenses of traditions passed down by previous generations of practitioners.

What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition. (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 221)

Roles are imbued with expectations regarding what things we ought to accomplish, how we ought to accomplish them, to what standard, and toward what end. When the performance of a role does not “live up to” the moral commitments of that role, the result is a kind of moral incoherence. For example, when journalists present news in a way that distorts the truth, their performance is at odds with the commitment to truthfulness that their role substantively requires. Stewart and Colbert have grounds to criticize journalists because journalists accept the expectations that come with their role and subject themselves to moral evaluation on the basis of these expectations.

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*Good journalists . . . try to  
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journalists, to the practice’s  
moral narrative.*

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MacIntyre (2007) noted that intentions matter for moral evaluation: “An action is a moment in a possible or actual history or in a number of such histories. The notion of a history is as fundamental a notion as the notion of an action. Each requires the other” (p. 214). We can only attribute intention if we have knowledge of someone’s history and the history of the settings in which she lives her life. This gives morality

a narrative quality. Journalism's tradition, which journalists interpret in the light of both their practice's history and the challenges it currently faces, provides the narrative context for determining whether a given performance is appropriate to the journalist's role at any given time. Because it is the practice's tradition that makes journalism intelligible as a moral activity, it literally does not make sense to morally evaluate the actions of imitators like Stewart as the actions of *journalists*, no matter how much their performances resemble the typical styles and techniques of *journalism*.

### The Moral Commitments of Journalists

The normative dimension of journalism most clearly distinguishes it from other activities in the media marketplace (Borden, 2007; Singer, 2003). It is precisely because Stewart and Colbert do not subject themselves to the same moral commitments as journalists do that they can perform journalism as they do. Furthermore, in order for audiences to get the joke, they, too, must know and identify with these commitments. As Baym (2005) noted, "Fake news necessitates assumptions about some kind of *authentic* or *legitimate* set of news practices, ideals that one rarely hears articulated or necessarily sees as evident today" (p. 261). Fake news allows journalists and others to re-examine the conventions that have been handed down to journalists, discover historically grounded alternative performances, and conceivably enhance the current pursuit of journalistic integrity.

Journalists pursue knowledge through a discipline of verification (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001) providing epistemologically defensible standards for creating and communicating knowledge about the social world. Among these standards are reliability, truthfulness, and independence. Ultimately, the practice pursues knowledge to help citizens participate meaningfully in the public sphere (Borden, 2007). The practice's purpose and epistemological standards constitute a set of moral commitments that normatively shape journalists' performances of news. Although a number of performance conventions could be discussed, we will focus on three that seem to be regularly implicated in the media criticism of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart (TDS)* and *The Colbert Report (TCR)*: gatekeeping, factuality, and objectivity.

#### Gatekeeping

Journalists have tried to distinguish themselves from other purveyors of information by instituting editing routines that promise to give the news audience the most important intelligence of the day, rather than

mere gossip or opinion. "The gatekeeper's function has always been one of quality control, however subjective the assessment of 'quality' might be" (Singer, 2003, p. 152). The convention of gatekeeping is the practice's attempt at exercising reliability, selecting the important over the trivial while avoiding sensationalism.

However, conventions for selecting stories, quotes, and so forth have their pitfalls. As Baym (2005) pointed out, the journalistic penchant for "tight" sound bites tends to give many quotations an artificial coherence they don't have in their raw form; this can have the effect of reifying official views of the world (Fishman, 1980). *TDS* routinely exploits this weakness by showing entire statements without editing them to take out awkward pauses, malapropisms, and so forth. The effect is to deflate the prestige of the speaker but also to show the hegemonic effect of such journalistic routines (Baym, 2005). When actor Mel Gibson's drunken driving charges and anti-Semitic remarks dominated the news for a few days in 2006, *TDS* replayed reports from the major networks showing clips from Gibson's movies in which the actor blew up cars or reached for alcohol. By replaying the clips, Stewart was criticizing not only the journalists' news judgment but the way in which video clips can easily be manipulated to sensationalize an event.

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### **Factuality**

Factuality might be defined as the opposite of the word Colbert satirically coined on his inaugural show in 2005: "truthiness." Whereas factuality demands fidelity to evidence that can be checked by others, truthiness is instinctive knowing unencumbered by logic or facts. "Anyone can read the news to you," Colbert told viewers. "I promise to *feel* the news at you" (Peysner, 2006).

Factuality is tied to the centrality of original reporting in journalism (Borden, 2007). *TDS* and *TCR* re-use information from mainstream news sources (Baym, 2005). There is no original reporting, and the "joke" interviews and gracious chats with guests are more in the tradition of late-night comedy shows like *Late Night with David Letterman*. On the other hand, by relying on raw material that has been "vetted" by journalists,

*TDS* and *TCR* implicitly buy into factuality—and its associated rules of evidence.

At the same time, “fake” news demonstrates how the same set of “facts” can be interpreted differently and contextualized more thoroughly. For example, after showing a number of sound bites with President George Bush repeating his message of the day about Iraq in separate talks in August 2006, Stewart pretended to be hypnotized and repeated the message robotically into the camera. Of course, what he was implying was that the President was manipulating journalists and their audience. As the program faded to commercial, a large black-and-white poster depicting a stylized visage of President Bush reminiscent of Communist propaganda appeared behind Stewart. In large block letters, the audience read “War is Peace”—an allusion to *1984*. Once again, Stewart was suggesting that what we heard the President saying was absurd, and he implicitly faulted the press for taking President Bush’s statements at face value and broadcasting them as if they were valid assessments of the situation in Iraq.

### Objectivity

Stewart iterates the critique of objectivity, another key performance convention in journalism. In their quest to be dispassionate and unbiased, journalists have become slaves to their sources, particularly “official” sources, and they feel compelled to withhold judgment, at least publicly, regarding competing truth claims (Fishman, 1980; Glasser, 1984; Tuchman, 1972), no matter their actual veracity. This can result in absurd performances in which journalists dutifully reproduce official pronouncements that distort or hide pertinent information, such as the oft-made statements by Bush Administration officials that former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was linked to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Although it is not impossible for journalists to step out of objectivity’s conventions and critique its pitfalls, it is a bit of a high-wire act professionally and has rarely been done. Stewart has no such worries.

It is *TDS*’s insistence that it is “fake news” that may protect it the most. This mantra allows it to dodge the formal constraints that News has trapped itself in, while staving off the ethically justifiable and logistically necessary criticisms that, in part, created the News’s formal constraints. (McKain, 2005, p. 429)

### The Performance of Journalism

The “performance of news” is a long-standing tradition in the arts dating back to the literary journalism of Defoe in *The Plague Years* and continuing to entertainment in the 20th and 21st centuries. In each instance,

imitators of journalism sought to take up the performance of journalism while changing audience expectations of it. The moments when the “performance of news” have been most controversial and relevant are times when society was adopting a new medium, and new conventions of journalism were simultaneously being established (see, e.g., Sconce’s 2000 discussion of the *War of the Worlds* broadcast).

In the 1990s, cable TV emerged as a technology and a player in creating these imitations. Cable shows have more content latitude than traditional network television. For example, Bill Maher was fired from ABC after remarks he made about the 9/11 terrorists not being cowards.<sup>2</sup> After Maher lost his job at the network, he went back to cable TV where he could free his performance for a niche audience, a process spurred by economic competition among the major cable outlets.

Cable TV journalists altered their journalistic performances to attract a larger audience; they became more sensational, ego-driven, trivial, entertaining, and manipulative. This excess is the frequent focus of *TDS* and *TCR* media criticism. Neither Stewart nor the parody Colbert creates is cynical; rather, they are idealists who hold or appear to identify with traditional journalistic moral commitments and democratic values. Although both Stewart and Colbert take on network TV journalism, cable TV news is the target of most of their criticisms, and they routinely challenge cable news journalists for the role-appropriateness of their performances.

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However, *TDS* and *TCR* are distinct from earlier “performances of news” because they parody the news while simultaneously presenting and criticizing it—hence the term “fake” news. The starting premise of the fake news routine often begins with real journalism. It is when the writers elaborate on that premise that they usually begin to take license. We grant them that license, as comedians, as long as they stick to the premise. Audiences expect humor to recast things in a new light. In effect, Stewart and Colbert appear to be giving performances that are appropriate to their role as *comedians*.

Fake in the sense of “counterfeit” does not apply to these programs, either. Counterfeit implies deceit. There is no deceit in *TDS* or *TCR*. Stewart and Colbert are not trying to get away with anything other than the comedy they intended. The humor of Colbert is a good example of

“counterfeit” because his persona is a parody of Bill O’Reilly, but at key moments he shifts from his persona to Colbert and, in those moments, expects his audience to know what he is doing. Colbert said on NPR’s *Fresh Air* (Gross, 2005) that his audience has to work hard. Counterfeiters hope their victims won’t work hard.

Historically, the journalist and the entertainer who takes on the role of journalist are acting in relation to one another. The performance of the imitator is constrained by journalism’s tradition. But people achieve “role distance” as a means to vary their performances and convey their intentions to others (Goffman, 1997). Thus, we can observe that a Stewart or a Colbert separates himself through the use of comedy from the role of journalist to enhance his own voice and status, and to bond with the audience though his “commitment” to a higher standard. That is how someone who inhabits the role of comedian can also perform the function of media criticism. In the next section, we explore how “fake” news as media criticism can hold journalists accountable for giving role-appropriate performances.

### “Fake” News as Media Criticism

Since the 19th century, certain journalists, including Will Irwin, George Seldes, A.J. Liebling, and Howard Kurtz, have made it their business to critique press performance. Typically, such criticism appears in the news columns and in the trade press, although more of this can now be found online.

Accountability has been identified as an important function for internal media criticism, both in terms of self-regulation and moral consensus. Accountability is being open to criticism and responsive to demands for an explanation when journalists fail to give role-appropriate performances. It is a legitimate call for an account in respect to role expectations that must be properly answered (Christians, 1989; Hodges, 1986; Klaidman & Beauchamp, 1987) and also serves to goad changes in performance.

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In practice, accountability is often conflated with responsibility (Plaisance, 2000), but in ethics they are distinguishable: Responsibility is about defining proper performances; accountability is about compelling them

(Hodges, 1986). Moral accountability involves voluntary acceptance of moral claims by stakeholders (Hodges). Lambeth (1992) noted the potential of media criticism to hold the press accountable in a way that seems to resolve the tension between journalistic accountability and journalistic autonomy. However, Bunton (2000) said media criticism is meaningful as self-regulation only if it has “clear influence on the practices and standards journalists consider acceptable” by stimulating “reflection about journalistic norms” (p. 73). This is not only a strategic necessity but also a moral one, particularly if professionals rest the legitimacy of moral commitments on moral consensus. The latter is the approach taken by Christians (1989), whose perspective is explained by Glasser (1989):

Ethical claims can be justified only as they are grounded in moral facts, where “facts” are taken to be social phenomena and where the community is taken to be their source of epistemic authority. A normative social ethics of the kind Christians proposes deals with questions of media accountability not by providing a blueprint for conduct but by offering a meaningful opportunity for a sustained, coherent, and unemotional discussion about the media and their service to the community. (p. 185)

Journalism exerts its moral authority over practitioners through discourse that sustains and repairs journalistic standards. Among other functions, this kind of collective sense making establishes some forms of moral identity as being cause for shame—whether it is for one’s own actions as a journalist or by the actions of another journalist who has let down the practice by violating its role expectations. The key audience here, however, is fellow journalists (Borden, 2007).

External criticism potentially plays a role in facilitating what Plaisance (2000) called the interactive component of media accountability. External criticism “challenges journalistic practices and norms in an effort to alter news selection and presentation” (Carlson, 2006, p. 6). Morally speaking, the goals may simply be to demand that journalists interact with the public in a way that is fair and responsive given their influence and that they live up to their own commitments. As Christians noted, “Those with power can be legitimately held accountable by the public they serve in the sense that they can be challenged to answer and explain when their behavior appears unacceptable” (1989, p. 40).

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*TDS* and *TCR* are interesting, in part, because they seem to occupy a place on the line between internal and external criticism. Although these programs are created and produced by nonjournalists, the creators of both programs are familiar with the moral standards and performance conventions of journalism, and their stars are routinely quoted, interviewed, and highlighted by bona-fide journalists. In fact, *TDS* and *TCR* are performing a valuable auditing function, watching and covering the powerful. They play the role of speaking what goes unsaid in mainstream news, or of highlighting the non-sense of what *is* said. By being seen as both insiders and outsiders, Stewart and Colbert can clearly do—and get away with—what journalists cannot.

For example, “Mess O’ Potamia,” the screen title that Stewart showed when he turned to the topic of Iraq, humorously captured the spiraling crisis in Iraq in a way that would have led observers to make charges of bias had it been used on a news program. Stewart could do this because he did not have to worry about striving for “balance.” Moreover, Stewart had the independence from authority to call the situation in Iraq a civil war in early 2006; journalists, on the other hand, waited until late that year. Stewart’s criticism is both internal and external: It comes from a comedian, but this comedian’s pronouncements strike many as evidence that he can, at times, perform journalism better than journalists themselves.

### Role Expectations and the Audience

Journalists’ role expectations give them latitude to perform the news in a variety of ways that give body to their role. However, the practice has a momentum in terms of the performance range that it allows and that the audience will accept. Individual journalists take a risk if they choose performances that fall outside this range unless the situation morally demands it. In such cases, journalists must carefully calibrate their performances to the context. Audience members, for their part, must calibrate their reception to the performances based on their existing expectations about the journalist’s role and their own understanding of the situation. For example, many journalists who reported on Hurricane Katrina opted for advocacy performances that included overt displays of emotion. The scope of the disaster, and the government’s failure to respond to it adequately, motivated and justified this departure, as did an historical strand in journalism’s tradition.

We propose, here, to explain how the performances of comedians and journalists are related to the role expectations that the audience has of them and the expectations that journalists and their imitators have of the audience. An important part of this discussion is whether the setting, or

the medium of television, is a barrier for journalists to live up to their commitments. For example, television demands not only that we *see* an event but that we *feel* it, resulting in visually oriented performances that can become emotionally manipulative. Television also values stylized performances. However, television's limitations as a medium for performing journalism may be a boon to imitators like Stewart and Colbert, who can use these limitations to deflect flak ("It's *just* television").<sup>3</sup> The imitators serve as the interlopers who both deliver according to our performance expectations and who change those expectations.

Both traditional journalists and "fake" ones expect audiences to follow the news, work hard to understand the issues of the day, and care about civic participation. However, traditional journalists also expect audiences to accept their judgment about what is important and their version of the day's events. Traditional journalists also tend to report civic debate in terms of adversarial contests, a frame that effectively excludes the average audience member from meaningful participation. The imitators of news, in contrast, cultivate an egalitarian stance toward the audience. News shows are rarely performed in front of a live audience. The exceptions have been debates, but the audience in these situations was usually artificially restrained from taking sides. Stewart and Colbert destroy this artifice. By playing to their audiences and getting them to participate in their criticism of journalists, Stewart and Colbert change audience expectations of journalistic performances; audience participation is a noticeable difference from typical journalistic performances.

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The other way in which Stewart effectively relates to his audience is to let people know that he feels what they feel. He often opens up to them. The best example of this was his first post-9/11 appearance when he had to ease the audience back into comedy. He acknowledged the shock that Americans felt. He talked about his own discomfort at performing comedy. He broke down emotionally before his audience. Then he made the argument for why he was returning to comedy. In his speech, he framed himself and his audience as one. The egalitarian aspects of "fake" news serve to teach audiences that they have a stake in journalistic integrity.

People who agree with Stewart and Colbert see them as offering a reasonable view not readily available in journalism because of the

constraints of gatekeeping, factuality, and objectivity. In this respect, *TDS* and *TCR* offer the same kind of authenticity promised by bloggers and other online sources of information, and they promote the sort of interaction with audiences sometimes encouraged by cable news.

Despite these commonalities, however, cable TV news shares traditional journalism's tendency to control definitions of the news by invoking a privileged perspective. This perspective contributes to journalism's remoteness as experienced by the audience. The capacity of comedy to humanize, on the other hand, is an important aspect of its appeal. Ultimately, this quality promotes identification between the audience and comedians. Identification makes the performance funny—and also potentially influential by privileging the audience's point of view and making its members feel smart. All of these different dimensions of the imitators' relationship with audiences work together to make *TDS* and *TCR* noticed and heeded in ways potentially large (as in influencing journalistic and democratic practice) and certainly small (as in promoting cohesion among well-informed, educated audiences on the political left).

### Implications for Media Ethics

We have argued that Stewart and Colbert do not inhabit the role of journalists but, rather, adopt the performances of journalists to draw attention to lapses in journalistic integrity. In effect, they function as media critics with quasi-insider status because their critiques rely on a consensus about journalism's moral commitments. This consensus promotes identification between them and the journalists they mock and also gives them common ground with the audience.

Just as Stewart and Colbert have sounded the alarm on infotainment, journalists have done the same, at least since the first big tabloid stories (think Lorena Bobbitt and Tonya Harding) "infected" mainstream news in the 1980s. When audiences laugh with Colbert, they are also laughing with journalists who share their disdain for O'Reilly and everything he represents. Therefore, at the same time Stewart and Colbert critique the fine points of journalists' performances in the current climate of cable TV news, they also support journalists' traditional moral commitments. This "common language" allows Stewart and Colbert to efficiently get from the set up of the joke to the punch line, but it also potentially empowers the audience to exert itself as a partner in co-defining the role of journalist by creating a dialogic space (Carlson, 2006) for constructing what it means to be an ethical journalist.

Journalists can learn some valuable lessons from their encounter and interaction with "fake" news. For example, Stewart reminds journalists and the audience that, at times, journalists need to embrace a subjective

stance and call it like they see it rather than hide behind objectivity. In the 1950s, Edward R. Murrow was an anomaly for standing up to Sen. Joseph McCarthy on his show *See It Now*. Similarly, as the anchor of the *CBS Evening News*, Walter Cronkite went on a limb in 1968 and declared the Vietnam War a "stalemate." These performances are admired within journalism's tradition and can be invoked appropriately by journalists today. Likewise, Stewart's performance after 9/11 falls in line with those of journalists who, through their direct emotional responses, have helped audiences acknowledge their own feelings. One might think of Herbert Morrison's response on the radio while he watched the crash of the Hindenburg: "Oh, the humanity!" Or one might recall Cronkite's reaction on live TV as he broke down announcing the death of President John F. Kennedy. More recently, we observed the silence of TV journalists as the second plane hit the Twin Towers in New York City, and when they covered the carnage at Virginia Tech. These honest reactions illustrate how journalists can model both emotional and intellectual responses for the audience, and how appropriate it can be at times to set themselves apart from typical performance styles.

Stewart and Colbert cater to a niche audience, to be sure, but part of the reason they give their own excellent performances as comedians is that they treat those who watch them as if they are competent equals. One of the ways in which this shows up on *TDS* is the way in which Stewart regularly unveils some of the conventions behind power as it is currently projected. Journalists, likewise, should consider adopting performances that are more transparent about the production of knowledge, by journalists as well as by the powerful people they cover.

While "fake" news offers a strong criticism of conventional journalistic performances, it has its own limitations. Journalists can draw ethical lessons from these as well. Although Stewart pleaded directly for journalistic reform on *CNN Crossfire*, that was a performance that was "out of character" for him as a comedian. Indeed, the role of comedian restricts the range of role-appropriate expression for Stewart and Colbert just as surely as the role of journalist restricts performances of "real" news. By default, the humor of Stewart and Colbert will tend to cast stones rather than to build bridges, to point out problems rather than to craft solutions, to interrupt discussion with laughter rather than to sustain it by articulating common values. Journalists do not have the same limitations on their performances.

The format of "fake" news, with its dependence on mimicry, also means that Stewart's and Colbert's critiques will be based on recycled news, Internet chatter, and C-SPAN footage. These shows are not going to go out digging for the "story behind the news" any more than the lazy or resource-strapped journalists they criticize. But journalists could and

should. By learning from the strengths and limitations of “fake” news as a form of media criticism, journalists can align their performances with the moral commitments that define them and thus inhabit their role with integrity. The stakes are high for journalists, their imitators, and the rest of us.

### Notes

1. Stewart to CNN Hosts: “Stop . . . Stop . . . hurting America. And come work for us. . . . We need your help. Right now you’re helping the politicians and the corporations and we’re left out there. . . . You are part of their strategy. You are partisan hacks.”  
 Moments later, Stewart to hosts: “But my point is this, if your idea of confronting me is that I don’t ask hard-hitting enough news questions, we are in bad shape fellas. . . . I’m here to confront you because we need help from the media and they’re hurting us.”  
 Stewart to hosts: “You have a responsibility to public discourse and you fail miserably.”
2. White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer responded to Maher’s words: “. . . they’re reminders to all Americans that they need to watch what they say, watch what they do. This is not a time for remarks like that; there never is.” (Office of the Press Secretary, 2001)
3. Our thanks to Andrew R. Cline for these insights.

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