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- Bugeja, Michael (2008) **Living Ethics Across Media Platforms**. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 341.

Michael Bugeja's ethics textbook, *Living Ethics Across Media Platforms*, appears designed to serve students across a variety of fields, from advertising to public relations to journalism, and to encourage personal responsibility in a morally converged as well as media-converged world. *Living Ethics* re-titles and updates with more than 100 new sources and excerpts an ethics book from more than a decade ago. The prose is straightforward—no arcane definitions or philosophical gobbledygook here—and the advice for students appears wise.

The book's first nine chapters (Influence, Responsibility, Truth, Falsehood, Manipulation, Temptation, Bias, Fairness, and Power) build toward a final chapter on personal and professional value systems. In that chapter, as he does throughout the book, Bugeja makes good use of others' expertise.

John Arends, president of a family-owned branding and marketing agency, says living ethics is a five-to-nine, not nine-to-five job: You need to use your off-hours to prepare for the ethical challenges likely in the day ahead. Gene Policinski, executive director of the First Amendment Center, recommends young people begin to create "a 'moral compass' or code of ethics for themselves—and then compare that with the employers they hope to work for."

The book clearly has the student in mind. Advice throughout pushes students to question their behavior. In his chapter on manipulation, Bugeja cautions: "To guard against hoaxes and your own preconceptions, you must analyze your secret self and acknowledge your fears, desires, convictions, and values that might invite manipulation" (p. 161).

The chapter on temptation provides a plagiarism primer. Helpful journal exercises end each chapter. Useful lists (moral absolutes, civic absolutes, seven principles of moral convergence, five principles common to ethics codes worldwide) abound, though Bugeja tries too hard with his list of twenty-six first principles, each headed by a brief slogan that begins with a different letter of the alphabet.

Bugeja's book reports on important topics that other authors fail to cover adequately. He discusses the tension between those consultants who advise media companies to develop their brands by targeting certain audiences versus those who argue news media should cover all communities, not just those targeted in marketing reports. He tells the story of *Highlights for Children*, where editors live the magazine's motto: Children are the world's most important people. Every letter to the magazine—hundreds arrive each month—is answered individually.

Bugeja does not avoid controversy. In a fascinating chapter on power (and compassion), he makes the case for why media companies should not be publicly traded. He also strongly argues for media rigorously fact-checking content, going against the newsrooms that refuse to do so because of the fear, as he notes, "that a source will argue about an assertion or otherwise compromise a reporter." He quotes journalist Chris Adams: "With the ubiquity of e-mail, it's very easy to check back with sources, even on deadline, to make certain nothing is inaccurate."

Now for a few nitpicks about the book. Bugeja, the gracious, generous director of the Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication at Iowa State University, makes a habit of complimenting people in person. That carries over to this book. Professionals cited are invariably “distinguished,” “prominent,” eminent,” or “great.” Perhaps a textbook for journalism students should rely less on effusive adjectives; however accurate they may be, they grate.

The citation of experts, strength of the book, occasionally becomes overkill (or overquote). One paragraph squeezes in quotes from the Random House dictionary, textbook authors, Edward Spencer and Brett Van Heekeren, and Socrates. Another paragraph manages quotes from three more sources—Ben H. Bagdikian, Davis Merritt, and Jay Rosen.

A more important concern with this textbook, one that transcends the nitpick category, is that *Living Ethics* argues that advertising and public relations “do not operate on different standards from those that apply to news journalism.” All three—advertising, public relations, and journalism—embrace objectivity as a process, says Bugeja, just “at a different stage of the process.” But when you look at how people in advertising, public relations, and journalism approach, say, tobacco products, responsible for killing millions of people worldwide, you have to wonder whether Bugeja, in his idealism, is overstating his point. He rightly wants to avoid the elitism of journalists who stare down their snouts at practitioners of advertising and public relations.

In his discussion of “rainbows of truths,” however, he fails to address adequately the untruths that have characterized advertising, public relations, and journalism associated with the tobacco industry. Perhaps we have moved beyond the era of suppressed medical evidence, misleading public relations by the Tobacco Institute, and tobacco company advertising that in effect lied. But the impacts of the tobacco industry on the public’s health and the ethics of the news media deserve a more candid and complete assessment than this book provides. (As I write, the *Onion*, the satirical weekly newspaper aimed at young people, carries an advertising insert from R.J. Reynolds for Camel Snus, which a YouTube critic says “tastes like Frosted Flakes on steroids.”)

Similarly, the book raises—but fails to discuss adequately—the argument by obesity expert Judith S. Stern that the food industry has a social responsibility to put calorie labels on all foods and media professionals have a duty to provide balanced, stereotype-free reporting, and advertising campaigns that do not mislead about obesity. Bugeja simply says, “But public relations practitioners writing or lobbying on behalf of the food industry routinely resist those efforts” (p. 228).

In summary, this is an ambitious, innovative textbook seeking to rethink the teaching of ethics by emphasizing personal responsibility across all media and media fields. It might be helped by more discussion of distasteful, dollar-driven media practices. But it benefits enormously from its attention to personal lessons about ethics and values that the digital-age student needs to know.

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