

Prospectus

Living Ethics across media platforms

Michael Bugeja, Ph.D.
Director
Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa 50011

Brief Description

Living Ethics across media platforms differs from other media ethics texts in that it focuses on issues associated with moral (rather than technological) convergence. It posits that moral convergence is essential to address the complex issues of our high-tech media environment. As such the book departs from and yet complements traditional pedagogy. Journalism educators spend so much time training students to work in one medium or across media platforms, offering up lessons to look “out there” for news, photographs and clients, rather than “in here” for directions on how to serve the audience, maintain standards and act conscientiously as a professional. *Living Ethics* asks students, often for the first time in their education, to look within for answers because they will take their values to the workplace. Excerpts from more than 100 scholarly books and dozens of magazine articles and Web sites will ground the work philosophically and academically. However, the emphasis in *Living Ethics* is on motive rather than on media platform, even though the book will showcase between 75-125 interviews from professional journalists working at newspapers, magazines, public relations, and advertising or as online practitioners and photojournalists.

This approach also distinguishes the work from other texts in the genre. With the focus on motive and moral convergence, *Living Ethics* levels the playing field by treating each media platform as equal partner. For instance, unlike other ethics texts, this one does not recognize “Advertising Ethics” or “Public Relations Ethics” as distinct from “Newspaper Ethics.” Public relations and advertising, indeed, have the same standards of objectivity (applied at different stages of the process). Advertisers, for instance, must assess, as factually as possible, the need for a product before creating a subjective campaign to promote that product. Public relations practitioners responding to RFPs not only must understand the communication issue at hand objectively but also must research that issue before creating a strategy and later, a presentation in competition with other agencies. Indeed, newspaper journalism can be highly subjective at the beginning of the process—getting a tip from a source, for instance—but becomes increasingly objective through the editorial/gate-keeping process. *Living Ethics* addresses topics in this manner, finding commonalities in our standards rather than differences in our approaches.

When we classify ethics by sequence, we focus on *circumstances and settings* but not on *values*. In truth, the reporter who plagiarizes a story is no different, ethically speaking, from a marketer who steals media-buying research. Newsrooms differ from agencies, of course, but the motive is the same: *temptation*.

Living Ethics also addresses all sequences for another, practical reason: Journalism and communication graduates often work in other media-related disciplines, especially in an era of convergence. The book does not promote convergence; in fact, it looks at the ethical issues associated with working across platforms. However, as a matter of fact in media at the moment, those who embark on a typical career in journalism and mass communication will likely switch mediums or be required to know several kinds of media. That is why the focus in *Living Ethics* is on values instead of platforms to prepare students to serve responsibly in any future communications job.

“Living Ethics” familiarizes learners with basic ethical concepts from which they can derive answers to seemingly complex questions. Examples:

- *Conscience*: The conscience is associated with ethics—an intuitive knowledge of right and wrong—involving how we choose to live among and view others in a diverse community.
- *Consciousness*: Consciousness is associated with *awareness*—how our interactions affect or influence others and ourselves in that diverse community.

Conscience and consciousness, and how they play into decision making, ground *Living Ethics* thematically. Each chapter pivots on conscience and consciousness, portals of emotional intelligence through which students feel values rather than just explicate them.

Outstanding Features

Living Ethics employs an applied ethics pedagogy, associating abstract values with concrete situations across media platforms. The book has three sections: Influence, Responsibility, Truth to develop ethical awareness; Falsehood, Bias, Manipulation, Temptation to test ethical values; Fairness, Discretion, Power to enhance ethical values. Each chapter helps students assemble a personal ethics code included in clip books and portfolios so that they have a concrete symbol by which to live their values.

Students living their ethics possess the ability to:

- Distinguish between good and bad, outcomes over which we have little control, versus right and wrong, choices over which we have much control.
- Foresee short-term from long-term consequences before making choices.
- Accept responsibilities for their choices, no matter if the outcome is good or bad.
- See the world as it actually is rather than through personal filters of self-interest, ego or fear.
- Develop conscience and consciousness so that they work as effortlessly as hand-eye coordination.
- Be sensitive to others' viewpoints and their own emotions so that they can learn from others and be more aware of motives, including their own.
- Apply only as much power as needed to resolve a challenge without creating greater problems or harm to innocent others.

All the while students will be creating a practical and/or creative project in their major, from advertising to photojournalism: a personal ethics code. Opinions on such codes differ, of course; but each major association (Society of Professional Journalists, Public Relations Society of America, etc.) have them. Also, nearly all media outlets across platforms have ethics codes and mission statements. So such codes have become a reality at the workplace. From a practical standpoint, many graduates are prepared to do skills-work when applying for jobs. They can write or broadcast news or work with clients. Employers know that. What companies are looking for, however, is the applicant's sense of personal accountability. Personal ethics codes provide evidence of that.

To see sample codes, visit this URL: <http://www.livingethics.com>

In sum, *Living Ethics* builds an ethical foundation based on mindfulness in diverse community and then tests and enhances that foundation.

Competition

This approximate 300-page ethics book is targeted at journalism and mass communications programs at the undergraduate level (with some crossover to other disciplines with media-related content including but not limited to Communication Studies, Political Science and Business).

Unlike other top-selling ethics texts, which focus on news-editorial, *Living Ethics* is meant for classes that combine all sequences— advertising, broadcasting,

magazine journalism, news-editorial, online journalism, public relations and photojournalism—under the following unifying theory: *While circumstances of ethical issues may vary, the moral processes are usually the same.*

More than three-quarters of existing ethics texts are geared toward newspaper majors. *Living Ethics* not only postulates that circumstances may differ but moral processes do not; the book also adjusts for convergence, noting that individual majors will be required to use other media, gather information and interact with practitioners in other outlets in a wide network that includes communication agencies and corporate public affairs.

Professors may wish to use *Living Ethics* for the emphasis on values, for the exercises or for ethics code information. If they are using existing texts like *Media Debates* or *Media Ethics: Cases and Issues*, both of which present complex situations from opposing perspectives, they can use *Living Ethics* as a supplemental text to apply moral focus to case studies. *Living Ethics* also can be used for its end-of-chapter material and journal exercises. Students also can refer to sections in the text to explain the decision-making process outlined in these two and other debate-based ethics books, including *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning*.

In this, too, *Living Ethics* distinguishes itself from the competition. Values assignments relating to all majors—using a conscience-consciousness pedagogy—add concrete and/or moral context to such competing books as *Groping for Ethics in Journalism* and *The Virtuous Journalist*.

Finally, although the work cites traditional philosophy, it does not rely heavily on that, as do other media ethics books. Philosophy-based media ethics texts require students to memorize arcane terminology, understand obtuse concepts, and then try to relate them to professional circumstances in the high-tech media world. That is not to say Socrates, Confucius, Schopenhauer and other philosophers do not make contributions; indeed, these and other philosophers are cited when appropriate. However, a better philosophical and applicable grounding is derived from media history. Thus, students will learn the ethics and approaches of such figures as Ben Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and Eleanor Roosevelt who had more impact and influence on media than traditional philosophers whom students routinely study in liberal arts/general education classes.

Apparatus

Living Ethics seeks to: (a) evoke emotional intelligence associated with conscience and consciousness, so that students feel as well as know their values; (b) spark discussions via case studies from a morally informed perspective; and (c) encourage students to develop values in the work place by assembling codes as “living documents.” At the end of each chapter the book will contain an ethics/journal exercise. Here is a sample:

Fairness: A Continual Process

Fairness is *a continual process of self-improvement involving the evaluation of work and behavior to determine whether:* (a) your work, action or stance is accurate and truthful, (b) your behavior is honest and appropriate, and (c) your methods or values can be enhanced to meet those goals.

1. *Acknowledging Pre-Existing Conditions*

To resolve differences fairly with another person or group, you have to determine what, if any, pre-existing conditions may influence your or others' judgment.

Ask yourself:

- Am I willing to approach specific people or issues with an open mind or do I have any pre-conceived notions that may lead to more conflict or greater disputes?
- Are others willing to approach me with an open mind or do they seem to have pre-conceived notions that may lead to more conflicts or greater disputes?
- Have all parties listened carefully to each other to dispel any such pre-conceived notions?

2. *Balancing Viewpoints and Differing Interests*

To promote fairness, you should be able to identify, evaluate and balance viewpoints and interests of others.

Ask yourself:

- Am I certain that I understand the viewpoint of adversaries?
- Have I seen the consequence or impact of my action or stance through their eyes?
- Have I been careful to express my views accurately and appropriately?
- Are there any misperceptions in my or others' viewpoints that need to be identified, addressed and/or balanced before attempting to resolve differences?

3. *Seeking Bonds or Advice*

To ensure fairness, the parties involved should seek out common bonds or opinions and/or contact impartial advisers to resolve issues or disputes.

Ask yourself:

- What experiences or values do I and the other party share so that we can identify common bonds?
- What interests or activities do I and the other party share so that can identify like opinions?
- What specific concerns shall we bring to the attention of impartial experts so that we can overcome basic obstacles and try one more time to reach a decision or resolution?

4. *Evaluating Actions or Treatment*

To enhance fairness in the future, you need to evaluate the above processes to determine whether you have learned anything from the issue, dispute or resolution.

Ask yourself:

- How could I have been treated more fairly?
- How could I have treated the other party more fairly?
- How has the process affected or enhanced my values on fairness?

Additionally, each chapter will contain:

- Content about values that applies across all sequences: advertising, broadcasting, magazine journalism, news-editorial, online journalism, public relations and visual communications. (Because content focuses on values, teachers will be able to adapt it to support existing lectures or generate course revisions, deepening the level of instruction.)
- Exercises to build, test and enhance individual value systems. (End-of-chapter exercises provide instructors with a convenient system to monitor the ethical development of their students.)
- Writing and creative assignments to assemble a professional ethics code.

Audience

The work is written in an engaging style, meant to encourage readers to explore and analyze their own values and that of the various media, with the ultimate goal of aligning their values with that of a company for which they hope one day to work.

As such, the work is targeted at undergraduate ethics classes in journalism and communication programs with graduate-level crossover in units that re-credential master's students in media disciplines.

Market Considerations

Living Ethics was designed, primarily, as a required book. The text builds, challenges and enhances the individual value systems of students in a precise, step-by-step manner, culminating in a practical document that students can include with their resumes, clipbooks and portfolios. No other ethics text in use today focuses exclusively on values, addresses all journalism and communication sequences, and helps students assemble personal ethics codes for use in identifying companies with values similar to their own.

Living Ethics can also be used to augment material in an existing text. Instructors can use it as a supplement, primarily because of the content about values unifying all journalism sequences under one moral umbrella, in addition to ethics exercises culminating in a professional document to accompany clipbooks and portfolios.

Status of the Book

The book will be a new edition. The author has six years of updated content material already collected. The work should come in at 60,000 words. In my capacity as director of a major journalism school, I have access to top practitioners in all fields. They will be interviewed on the role of values in their work.

The author estimates delivery of the manuscript in September 2006.