REVIEW ARTICLE
Systems of Ethical Reasoning and Media Communications

Mahmoud Eid, University of Ottawa, Canada

Communicating Ethically: Character, Duties, Consequences, and Relationships
William W. Neher and Paul J. Sandin
© 2007 by Boston: Pearson Education
340 pp.
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Ethics in Media Communications: Cases and Controversies
Louis Alvin Day
© 2006 by Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth
480 pp.
$145.95
ISBN 978-053-4637-14-9

Comparing Media from Around the World
Robert McKenzie
© 2006 by Boston: Pearson Education
372 pp.
$99.60
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INTRODUCTION

At present, the field of media studies is faced with rapidly changing norms and constant technological advancements. Corporations dominate Western society, as their messages bombard public and private life, making it easy to get lost amidst our obsession with brands and commodities. However, as we find ourselves struggling in an era where money is paramount and image is everything, the importance of just and sound decision-making becomes increasingly important. Three books are fundamental sources of knowledge in this regard. *Communicating Ethically: Character, Duties, Consequences, and Relationships* (2007), by William N. Neher and Paul J. Sandin, provides insight on how to harness our ethical capabilities amidst the confusion and temptations of today's society. *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases and Controversies* (2006), by Louis Alvin Day, demonstrates an optimistic position on media ethics education in contemporary society. *Comparing Media from Around the World* (2006), by Robert McKenzie, presents an insightful amalgamation of topics that exist at the forefront of media

studies today—globalization, media systems, technology, and culture.

Ethical Reasoning Systems and Applications

In *Communicating Ethically*, stylized for university students or those looking to expand their knowledge in the field of ethics, Neher and Sandin provide the reader with a framework for ethical reasoning. The first part of this book introduces major systems of ethical reasoning throughout history: virtue ethics, universalistic systems, egalitarian and utilitarian ethical theories, dialogical ethics, and postmodern and feminist perspectives. The second part of this book identifies the application of ethics, linking the theories described to real-world case studies. In many ways, this text is a typical ethics textbook; it provides theory, philosophy, and background followed by real-world application.

Neher and Sandin's discussion on dialogical ethics is particularly enlightening, as they show that dialogical ethics is an excellent way to understand ethics from an experiential, everyday point of view: "our personal ethics are formed by, and demonstrated in, the ways in which we *dialogue* with others" (2007, p. 87). Dialogical ethics forces us to forgo the superficialities and defence mechanisms we so frequently utilize, and requires that we seek open, honest communication. This discussion is not only very relevant to the practice of ethics, but an all-around, important virtue. This approach is also a reminder of our human nature, and that we have the ability to foster relationships and build lasting trust and respect. In essence, this perspective places emphasis on the importance of dialogue and the way in which it can allow for sound communication between two moral agents. However, there are many large obstacles impeding our ability to communicate using this method. One unique concept the authors provide the reader is the concept of the "game," which allows us to evaluate the advantages of the different ethical systems discussed. As described by Neher and Sandin, "the notion of *Playing the Game* introduces the possibility that lying and deception are acceptable if not necessary when advancing one's own interests" (2007, p. 86). Sometimes, deception is considered the only way to move forward in a situation or achieve a certain goal. At first glance, it is easy to dismiss this "game" as a practice for unethical people; however, it is revealed that this concept is present in many aspects of our daily lives.

Following the discussion of theories, the authors look at the application of these systems to ethical issues. Neher and Sandin look at political, interpersonal, and mass communication. However, their text differentiates itself from others by providing a particularly insightful dialogue on organizational communication. Today, it is very common for large organizations to have a code of ethics, as it allows for people to understand their rights and responsibilities. If comprised properly, a code of ethics also allows for people to develop a sense of belonging and community within an organization via shared goals and values. However, codes of ethics are never complete and thus do not always achieve these goals. From a contemporary perspective, many organizations have a great responsibility linked to their great propensity for financial gain and their persuasive power, yet this power has often been abused. Communication is key to any ethical act; however, organizations sometimes fail to own up to their responsibilities, sparking public outcry and discontent among employees. Thus, the unique nature of the discussion on organizational communication in this text stems from its focus on a realm of communication that has become increasingly important in Western society due to an influx of ethical misconduct within organizations.

Perhaps the most unique form of communication discussed in this book is that between a person with disabilities and a person without. While most ethics books share the importance of communicating through an egalitarian perspective, rarely do they look at communication with disabled people. Situations that require increased dedication to the communication process because of challenging obstacles are often overlooked. The authors wonder how

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