**Rhetoric, Ethics, and all of the available means in**

**(strategic) Organizational Communication**

The fundamental tension: “Discovering all of the available means of persuasion in any given case.”

Does this mean that “anything goes”?

If not, why not?

Here stand Plato the idealist vs. Aristotle the pragmatist.

Let’s stipulate, for at least a moment, that the ends should not always justify the means. In fact, saying that they do almost always puts one in a VERY perilous ethical dilemma.

Still, let’s also recognize that being an Organizational Communication professional means that YOUR ethical system has to work inside of/around/outside of the organization’s ethical system.

Can you act as you want? Can you act as you must? Can you evade ethical responsibility because it’s your job?

This is probably the toughest bind in the business. It’s virtually inevitable. It’s largely why I’m not in the business. (but I did not fully escape as I face these issues within my organization as well). And you may well have less control early in your career than later and that may not be a good excuse.

[I hate to say this, but EVERYTHING matters, all the way back, and it always will. My bad choices go back to 5th & 7th grade, high school, and college. Then it got way worse early in graduate school. My job search probably didn’t put me in the right place, but here I am. One hardly ever thinks that the first job search sets the course of ones entire life, but it can. Red Pill or Blue Pill? Chose carefully --- and not just cause you think you have to take one].

“Perspectives on Ethics in Persuasion”

Richard Johannesen, Northern Illinois University

http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/perspectives\_on\_ethics\_in\_persuasion.pdf

1. Can I specify exactly what ethical criteria, standards, or perspectives are being applied by me or others? What is the concrete grounding of the ethical judgment?

SOME ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES (each have many sub-types)

Religious Perspectives

Human Nature Perspectives

Political Perspectives

Situational Perspectives

Legal Perspectives

Dialogical Perspectives

The call here is to ACTUALLY fully understand the shape(s) and content of the system(s) that you use. To have studied its foundations. To understand its nuances. To fully embody its parameters. This requires dedicated, scholarly study. Neither a quick trip through the internet via google nor a received religion or philosophy from ones’ caregivers or peers. “Know yourself” in this instance, but studying what you think you know.

2. Can I justify the reasonableness and relevancy of these standards for this particular case? Why are these the most appropriate ethical criteria among the potential ones? Why do these take priority (at least temporarily) over other relevant ones?

It’s not enough for you to “just know that it is right for me.” Such thinking limits the application of the ethic TO JUST YOU AND YOUR BEHAVIOR(S) FOR YOU. You must be able to justify selecting/applying the ethic in general, in these organizational cases.

[Ed inserts:

1. Can I specify exactly what rhetorical approaches, standards, or perspectives are being applied by me or others? What is the concrete grounding of the rhetorical approach?
2. Can I justify the reasonableness and relevancy of these approaches, standards, or perspectives for this particular case? Why are these the most appropriate rhetorical approaches, standards, or perspectives among the potential ones? Why do these take priority (at least temporarily) over other relevant ones?
3. Specifically, where does my organization (or my division, etc.) stand? What are its rhetorical standards?
4. Do the organization’s rhetorical standards match mine? If not, what shall I do? (and for how long?)

[back to Johannesen]

3. Can I indicate clearly in what respects the communication being evaluated succeeds or fails in measuring up to the standards? What judgment is justified in this case about the degree of ethicality? Is the most appropriate judgment a specifically targeted and narrowly focused one rather than a broad, generalized, and encompassing one?

4. In this case, to whom is ethical responsibility owed—to which individuals, groups, organizations, or professions? In what ways and to what extent? Which responsibilities take precedence over others? What is the communicator’s responsibility to her- or himself and to society at large?

5. How do I feel about myself after this rhetorical/ethical choice? Can I continue to “live with myself ” in good conscience? Would I want my parents or mate or best friend to know of this choice?

6. Can the ethicality of this communication be justified as a coherent reflection of the communicator’s personal character? To what degree is the choice ethically “out of character”?

7. If called upon in public to justify the ethics of my communication, how adequately could I do so? What generally accepted reasons or rationale could I appropriately offer?

8. Are there precedents or similar previous cases to which I can turn for ethical guidance? Are there significant aspects of this instance that set it apart from all others?

9. How thoroughly have alternatives been explored before settling on this particular rhetorical/ethical choice? Might this choice be less ethical than some of the workable but hastily rejected or ignored alternatives? If the only avenue to successful achievement of the communicator’s goal requires use of unethical communication techniques, is there a realistic choice (at least temporarily) of refraining from communication— of not communicating at all?

“:A conversation about Communication Ethics with Richard Johannesen.”

http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/a\_conversation\_about\_communication\_ethics\_with\_richard\_l.\_johannesen.pdf

A conversation about his development, interests, and themes

page 48-49 on adopting codes.

“The Ethics of Strategic Communication: Fall 2008”

Ethics Codes

http://journalism.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/stratcomweb/readings/Ethics-codes.pdf

All three documents are in resources on Sakai.