COM 31600: Prin. Of Persuasion

Chapter 2: Perspectives on Ethics in Persuasion

Ethical issues focus on issues where there is a value of right and wrong, virtue vs. vice, and how society should act.

Persuasion has the capability of becoming a ethical dilemma, because:

* Persuasion by one person involves the altering of another person’s beliefs and ideas.
* Persuasion can bring many outcomes and there many ways to use it. It is up to us to decide what end we want, and what strategies we use.
* Persuasion always involves rendering yourself vulnerable to the judgements of the receivers and observers.

As a persuasive agent, you will be called on by your conscience to reflect on your persuasive methods. Although, this reflection is sometimes neglected directly by others because;

* All involved parties recognize the ethical failings of the tactic
* Only the outcome is important, ethics are irrelevant
* The subjectivity creates an endless conversation regarding the ethics.

Ethical responsibilities can be borne from a position held or earned. **Responsibility** includes being held accountable and upholding promises to any number of parties. As a persuasive speaker, you are responsible for evaluating the methods you can use, how you use them, and the potential outcomes of using them in such a manner. **It is important to be thoughtful in your communication.**

In some cases where a communicator may use unethical method through accident, it may be forgiven. However, poor preparation of a persuasion is no excuse for ethical lapses.

This can be seen in people who use language littered with technical terms, it can misguide and confuse people, making it ethically wrong.

Although, sincerity of the speaker does not release them from their ethical bindings. We cannot say that Germans, listening to Hitler’s speeches judged him to be sincere and hence did not evaluate his argument, are just in their lack of evaluation.

There is a dichotomy in the U.S. between freedom of speech and the responsibility of speech. It is important that we not simply depend on the idea marketplace that is the U.S. forum, for evaluating our ideas, we must also vet them ensuring they are ethical.

Adaptation is important in persuasion, but it is to be moderated. Adapting your speech for a certain audience is paramount but adapting too much or too little is ethically irresponsible. You either end up saying whatever the audience wants to hear, or you stick to your guns too much and alienate the audience.

The means to one’s end are not always justified by the end. However to say that the ends do not always justify the means is different from saying they never justify the means. There are cases where the ends do justify the means, in cases of survival, national security, and protecting others. It is best to evaluate the ethics of persuasive techniques apart from the worth of the goal of a persuader. This will give the most ethically mature outlook.

Warren Bovee’s questions for determining degrees of ethicality

1. Are the means truly unethical or just distasteful/unpopular?
2. Is the end truly good, or is it simply our desire?
3. Is it probable that the unethical means will achieve the ethical end?
4. Is the same good achievable through ethical means?
5. Is the good end clearly and overwhelmingly better than the unethical means used?
6. Will the use of unethical means to achieve a good end withstand public scrutiny? Could the use of unethical means be justified to those most affected by them or to those most capable of impartially judging them?

Persuaders and Persuadees must interact mutually, otherwise the persuadees are likely to accept anything the persuader says. Persuadees must practice **reasoned skepticism** and **appropriate feedback.**

Skepticism is a balance between being gullible and dogmatic. You don’t soak up ideas and arguments, but you also don’t refute every idea tossed your way. A persuadee should aim to search for meaning, analyze, synethesize, and judge the worth of ideas. It is important to note that at times your own ethical standings may cause you to misinterpret the ideas proposed by a persuader.

**Religious Perspectives** on communications are based on the ideas that are assumed by religions, namely the relationship between humans and the divine. Many religions have basic guidelines. The bible vilifies lying and buddhism warns against four major types of unethical communication. An excellent way to view the relationship is to examine the case of Oral Roberts and his attempt to raise $8 Million.

**Human Nature Perspectives** probe what it means to be human and what makes us human. We should protect our ability to reach our greatest potential. We should protect our creativity, and efficacy. Thus methods that dehumanize are seen as unethical in this perspective. So, how do we evaluate situations like the unethical lyrics that are sometimes often sung by rap groups like Odd Future or the Rock legends Guns n’ Roses?

**Political Perspectives** are the values either implied or explicit that are viewed as crucial to the health and growth of a particular political system. Thus methods of action that would weaken a political system would be unethical. Although, the sheer variety of political perspectives can lead to a difference in ethical evaluations.

**Hate Speech** is a broad label that includes speech that degrades and humiliates individuals based on their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sex, or sexual orientation.

**Situational Perspectives** promote regularly focusing on elements of the specific persuasive situation at hand. This method will free up your ability to make persuasive evaluations outside of any given context that the others must cover.

Additionally, the concrete contextual factors relevant to making purely situational evaluations are:

* The role or function of the persuader for receivers
* Expectations held by receivers concerning matters such as appropriateness and reasonableness
* The degree of receivers’ awareness of the persuader’s techniques
* Goals and values held by receivers
* The degree of urgency for implementing the persuader’s proposal
* Ethical standards for communication held by receivers.

**Legal Perspectives** focus on illegal communication as unethical, but that which isn’t illegal is ethical. This will make ethical decisions easier, since you reference a persuasion with legalities. Although, you can perform ethically dubious actions while being perfectly legal. In order to protect ourselves from ethically dubious persuasion, do we integrate law and ethics?

**Dialogical Perspectives** view ethics in terms of the relationship between communicators. Communication as a dialogue is characterized by attitudes like honesty, concern for welfare, and improvement of trust, others, etc.

As a monologue, communication can be marked by deception, superiority, and exploitation. It is important to determine the persuader’s technique and if they are dialogical or monological.

**The Golden Rule:** *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*

The golden rule is not isolated to anyone religious ideology. The general interpretation is that you should only do to others what you would like done to yourself. Although, this idea does not always work since in different cultural situations, the other person may not want to be treated the way you want to be treated.

This leads to a new rule, **The Platinum Rule**: *Do unto others as they themselves would have done unto them*

This rule forces us into thinking about the values and preferences of others.

Is propaganda unethical? In the heat of the moment, the speaker may say that “my communication is persuasion, but my opponent is propaganda.”

Based on our definition, propaganda is unethical. It undermines the ability of humans to reason and hides information from the receivers.

**Demagogue** is a term used to negatively reflect persuaders.

Demagogues are defined using these 5 properties.

* Wield popular or mass leadership over an extensive number of people
* Exerts primary influence through the medium of the spoken word – whether through direct public speaking to an audience or through speaking via radio, tv or internet.
* Relies heavily on propaganda defined in the negative sense of intentional use of suggestion, scapegoating, irrelevant emotional appeals, and pseudo-proof in order to bypass the rational decision making.
* Capitalizes on the availability of a major current social cause or problem
* Is hypocritical. The social cause serves as a mask or persuasive leverage point while the actual primary motive is selfish interest and personal gain.

The key thing to know is that a real demagogue will display these traits all the time.

11 Political Persuasive Ethical Standards

* Do not use fabricated evidence to support your claims
* Do not use fallacious arguments
* Do not claim to be an expert on a given subject when you are not
* Do not use irrelevant appeals that will divert attention from the current issue.
* Do not ask your audience to link your idea to emotional values or motives which aren’t related.
* Do not conceal your purpose or the purposes of those you represent
* Do not distort, hide, or misrepresent the number, scope, intensity or undesirable effects of your actions or desired outcome
* Do not use emotional appeals that lack a supporting basis of evidence or reasoning
* Do not oversimplify complex situations into two polar views
* Do not pretend certainty where tentativeness and degress of probability would be more accurate
* Do not advocate something for which you do not believe yourself.

When it comes to advertising, people in this field will adopt legal perspectives. Legal perspectives being where they would align legality with ethics. Generally, advertisers will avoid producing advertising that contains:

* False or misleading statements, visual or verbal
* Testimonials that do not reflect the real choices of the individuals involved.
* Price claims that are misleading
* Claims that are insufficiently supported or that distort the true meaning or practical application of statements made by professional or scientific authority
* Statements, suggestions, or pictures offensive to public decency or to minorities.

**Language that is of doubtful or uncertain meaning**

This is the definition of **ambiguous** language; it is open to two or more interpretations. **Vague** language lacks definiteness or preciseness of meaning. Ambiguity and Vagueness may be seen as something to avoid and the basis of unethical communication. Although, some communicators see ambiguity as necessary, especially in the cases of advertising, religious discourse, and labor management bargaining.

Ambiguity can be justified in the case of:

* Heightening receiver attention through puzzlement
* Allowing flexibility in interpretation of legal concepts
* Allowing the precise understanding and agreement on the primary issue by using ambiguity on secondary issues
* To maximize receiver mental participation in the communications by letting the receivers create their own relevant meanings
* Promote maximum latitude for revision of a position in later dealings with opponents or with constituents by avoiding being locked into a single absolute stance.

Nonverbal communication is by far the most misunderstood part of communication. The way you motion your body, the use of silence, and even body posture all communicates something. The absence of communication is also communication, go figure.

Additionally, how you capture images and your use of them can also be considered communication.

**Moral Exclusion** occurs when individuals or groups are perceived as outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply. Those who are morally excluded are perceived as nonentities, expendable, or undeserving; consequently, harming them appears acceptable, appropriate, or just”.

The morally excluded are refused their rights and in some cases denied their dignity.

Many forms of exclusion use communication as a basis. The following symptoms are important for understanding moral exclusion and the mind sets of those involved.

* Showing the superiority of oneself or one’s group by making unflattering comparisons to other individuals or groups.
* Denigrating and disparaging others by characterizing them as lower life forms or inferior beings
* Denying that others possess humanity or a soul and deserve compassion
* Redefining as an increasingly larger category that of “legitimate” victims.
* Placing the blame for any harm on the victim
* Justifying harmful acts by claiming that the morally condemnable acts committed by “the enemy” are significantly worse
* Misrepresenting cruelty and harm by masking, sanitizing, and conferring respectability on them using neutral, positive, technical, or euphemistic terms to describe them
* Justifying harmful behavior by claiming that it is widely accepted or that it was isolated and uncharacteristic

**Feminism** is the idea that both women and men are complete and important human beings and that societal barriers have prevented women from being treated with equal worth to men. True feminism implies a commitment to equality and respect for life.

**Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin developed an *Invitational Rhetoric***. This rhetoric is defined in the assumptions that;

* Equal relationships between all are preferred to Dominative relationships
* Every human has value because they are unique
* Individuals have a right to self-determination concerning the conditions of their lives.

This form of rhetoric invites the audience into the world of the speaker, and to experience what the speaker experiences. All views are respected.