The Ethic of Expediency: Bush Less Intelligently Mimics Hitler

“The Ethic of Expediency: Classical Rhetoric, Technology, and the Holocaust”, written by Steven Katz explores the use of technical writing as a means to an end. The memo explored in this work, written by a man named Just, illustrates the importance of ethics in technical writing by showing a complete lack thereof in a memo written in Nazi Germany in reference to the need for transportation to be used to transport the dead bodies of those killed by the Nazis. It emphasizes the Nazi standpoint of acting as if those they were killing were not human, closing their hearts to the concept of it being wrong and viewing the deaths of millions as nothing more than a routine procedure for ending a problem. Through the use of metaphors and euphemisms, Just refers to the people transported in the vehicles as “merchandise” and refers to any remains from them as “pieces of dirt” completely dehumanizing the millions tortured and killed in such instances (Kats p255-266) .

Technical communicators face the tumultuous task of writing for a particular audience, focusing on that audience’s viewpoints, needs, and beliefs. The ethics behind the art of technical communication, such as those explored in “The Ethic of Expediency: Classical Rhetoric, Technology, and the Holocaust”, are often stretched beyond that of what is ethical and become, not only unethical, but result in terrible ends. However, the proposed audience of the memo was convinced by Adolf Hitler’s rhetoric that eliminating the “enemy” was not only necessary but was morally and ethically right, making the inhumane references to human beings as mere objects of hindrance in need of being exterminated a morally and ethically sound practice. Therefore, memos such as that explored in Kat’s work were accepted within the Nazi environment as ethically right, although the lack of ethics in such a memo is completely obvious.

The technical communicator’s job is to read or write with the efficacy and readability to be comprehensible to a particular audience. The concept and issue of ethics in technical communication is even more loudly pronounced in political rhetoric. Take for instance ex-president, George W. Bush and his many efforts toward his “War on Terrorism” following the attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11. By prescribing the title “Axis of Evil” to Iraq, Iran and Korea, Bush incidentally connected three separate and opposing countries as a mass terrorist entity, the primary threat to the United States, almost completely turning the attention from Afghanistan, where the attacks were actually based. Bush’s main agenda was Iraq and by presenting the “axis of evil” to his followers in his State of the Union Address and warning against supposed foreseen future attacks, Bush gained support in his desire to wage war on Iraq by the same notion as Hitler had in Nazi Germany. The Bush Administration mediated a sense of expediency, a necessity for war, and an ethical right for the deaths of over one hundred thousand innocent Iraqi civilians and over four thousand American soldiers not to mention the over thirty thousand American soldiers wounded since the occupation of Iraq.

The technical communicator writes for an audience, as a means of serving a specific purpose. Therefore, the communicators in both of the presented examples did their job efficiently, but without soliciting to any code of ethics, because nothing of the sort exists. In such instances as that of Nazi Germany and Bush’s rhetoric, it is important to realize that it is up to the audience to decide on the ethical stance and efficiency of the thoughts being technically communicated. There is no elected group to overlook all technical communicators to proofread and edit in search of issues surrounding ethics and so it is up to each technical communicator and their own ethical guidelines to utilize a sense of morality and ethos to serve the greater good rather than to cause negativity and deny the good of humanity.

Works Cited

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