

Quagmires and Quandaries by Ian Richards, UNSW Press, Sydney 2005 A\$34.95
reviewed by Howard Harris

This is not a how-to book for journalism students, although Richards is director of the post-graduate journalism program at the University of South Australia. He argues that the narrow, adhere-to-the-guidelines, approach to journalism ethics is inadequate because it masks or avoids any consideration of the nature of journalism itself. The role which journalists see for themselves has changed, at times elitist, at times socially responsible, and without an understanding of that role journalists will flounder. For the purpose of journalism is notoriously insecure and it is this shaky foundation, rather than 'the moral failings of individual journalists, editors or proprietors' that explain the problems of journalism ethics (*pxii*).

The book addresses questions of truth, the development and role of codes, plagiarism, privacy, post-modernism, grief, and the conflict between individual and corporate values. Whilst the book is well-illustrated with examples which will be recognised by Australian readers, it is not geographically limited in its relevance. Indeed, with its emphasis on the context in which the journalist works it 'makes a substantial contribution to journalism ethics literature' as Prof Jay Black from the Poynter-Jamison Centre at the University of Southern Florida observes in a cover note.

Rather than adherence to rules, Richards prefers a pragmatic approach. He draws on the work of late 19th century American educator and philosopher John Dewey to suggest that the basic principles must be applied to unprecedented situations with calculated inventiveness and resourceful improvisation. The book ends with a discussion of the implications of this for the education of journalists.

Quagmires and Quandaries is easy to read, logically structured, informed by current scholarship and relevant beyond the realm of journalism. The publisher, UNSW Press is offering a 20% discount to AAPAE members. To secure the discount go to the website www.unswpress.com.au/isbn/0868406236specd.htm