

Editorial Introduction

Honoring: A Retirement Celebration of Ronald C. Arnett through a Meeting of Scholarship and Friendship

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Ronald C. Arnett, Professor Emeritus at Duquesne University, was the first editor of this journal and is responsible for leading its creation and vision. In this issue of the *Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives*, we hear from multiple voices honoring the work, influence, and contribution of Arnett. It is with this intention that we devote this issue to the communication discipline as well as across, intersecting with, and converging with other disciplines, such as philosophy, linguistics, theology, and leadership studies. The collection of essays in this issue is uniquely curated, as contributors approach the celebration of Arnett's influence and impact on their work or professional life through different metaphors and varying experiences. Contributors to this issue include Janie M. Harden Fritz; Michael J. Hyde; Morgan C. Getchell, Timothy L. Sellnow, and Deanna D. Sellnow; Evgeniya Pyatovskaya and Patrice M. Buzzanell; Calvin L. Troup; and Richard H. Thames. They offer unique insights into application of Arnett's scholarship. The following are brief snapshots of their essays.

This issue is bookended with interviews of two of Arnett's colleagues, Janie M. Harden Fritz and Richard H. Thames, conducted by two of Arnett's former graduate assistants, Michael R. Kearney and Natalia E. Tapsak. We provide the transcripts of these interviews so that you can read, in Fritz's and Thames's own words, how Arnett impacted their professional and personal lives.

Janie M. Harden Fritz's interview opens this issue with her perspective and experience of working with Arnett. She offers some history from his first days after coming to chair the (then named) Department of Communication at Duquesne University. She provides discussion around the rise and rigor of faculty publications and the department's focus on constructive hermeneutics. Fritz weaves a tapestry comprised of theoretical coordinates, the significance of *Dialogic Education* (a book Arnett wrote in 1992 before joining the faculty at Duquesne

University), and stories about her professional friendship with Arnett, which developed organically over time.

Michael J. Hyde's essay acknowledges Arnett's 2017 book, *Levinas's Rhetorical Demand: The Unending Obligation of Communication Ethics*, and his focus on *home*. Hyde's essay unpacks the nature of home and provides a phenomenological understanding of it primarily through the works of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas. Hyde offers a case study that demonstrates the significance of home to human existence.

Morgan C. Getchell, Timothy L. Sellnow, and Deanna D. Sellnow provide a rich discussion of imaginative crisis planning based upon civil dialogue. Their essay uses Arnett's work pertaining to problems and solutions identified in the convergence of civil dialogue and crisis communication. They acknowledge Arnett's metaphor of holy sparks of truth to situate their argument for employing imaginative crisis communication through principles of civil dialogue.

Evgeniya Pyatovskaya and Patrice M. Buzzanell collaborate in their essay discussing feminist ethical dilemmas in communication scholarship. They employ Arnett's metaphor of *tenacious hope*, integrating it with the processes associated with feminist theorizing to reveal how dilemmas around gender justice emerge and evolve. They argue that tenacious hope, integrated with feminisms, can provide ethical positioning from which feminist ethical dilemmas and practices can be analyzed and used to impact and shape communication scholarship.

Calvin L. Troup, a former colleague of Arnett at Duquesne University, considers praxis implications of Augustine's leadership communication and employs Arnett's explication of Martin Buber's discussion of *community* and humility to advocate the practice of "leading from the middle." Augustine's leadership approach suggests that one cannot impose one's will upon another. Rather, leaders demonstrate service from the middle, alongside those they serve. This requires a liberation of sorts from the sentiment of control and is guided instead by a sentiment of community and togetherness. This is a testimony to Arnett's leadership style, which is paradigmatic of what Troup describes as leading from the middle.

Richard H. Thames's interview closes these contributions. His interview is full of stories about work, friendship, and life unfolding. Focusing on Arnett's leadership in the department and for the doctoral program, Thames provides insight into the various changes in the department over time and how Arnett's leadership was skilled and focused. Thames describes how Arnett modeled scholarship and publication, which cultivated and increased the scholarly reputation of the department, especially once the doctoral program started. Thames tells wonderful stories of the differences and commonalities between him and Arnett, often sharing deeply philosophical discussions driven by ideas, curiosities, and their individual passions. Thames tells the story of an unending friendship.

A final note: Ronald C. Arnett amassed a significant amount of scholarship over the course of his career. He also touched the lives of his colleagues, students, and many people in the discipline and around the world. He often referred to himself as a builder. I see him as a builder of ideas and practices, of refuges and

journeys. This is the mark of an impactful teacher—one who focuses on the other, teaches them, learns from them, and gives time freely and fully.

I recall a time early in my career when Arnett provided perspective and a voice of reason when I reached out to him in much distress about my decision to choose to work at my current institution. I recall very clearly that I was not sure that I made the best decision. Consistent with his understanding of the metaphor of existential homelessness and his turning toward the other with care and empathy, he gave me profound advice in the spirit of Martin Buber's (1991) *Tales of the Hasidim*. Yes, he wrote me an original Hasidic tale that sustained me and ultimately enabled me to flourish at my institution. While I promised never to share the tale, I have always kept it on my desk to remind me of Buber's communication ethic of walking the narrow path and experiencing mutuality and reciprocity. This year, as I am seriously considering when my own retirement will come (it is near) and contemplating this stage of my life, I gaze toward the tale that he wrote for me with great appreciation and admiration. I must acknowledge the significant impact that his words and his presence have had on me, both in my career (at work) and in my personal life (at home), especially when my parents died. He taught me to meet the other where they are, reminding me that they may be situated on differing grounds of the good and that these goods may be in contention—in fact, they often are—but we can choose to rise above the contention and competitiveness of those goods by navigating between I-It and I-Thou, between being functional and dialogical. Though not always easy to put into practice, the Hasidic tale spoke to me in a way that enabled me to see this space of engagement as a meeting ground, and it sustained me as I waded through the mud.

I celebrate the work and contribution of Ronald C. Arnett to the discipline and those with whom he encountered and worked, but I still have difficulty finding the words to express my admiration and appreciation for him. Therefore, I thought I would end my introduction to this issue with two of Buber's (1991) Hasidic tales, which reflect Arnett's attributes as a builder and a teacher. The first one is from Book Two: The Later Masters:

The Zaddikim That Build

Rabbi Yitzhak was asked: "How are we to understand the saying: 'Every zaddik in whose days the Temple is not built is no zaddik at all.' That would mean that all the zaddikim who have lived since the destruction of the Temple were not zaddikim." He explained: "The zaddikim are always building the upper sanctuary. The zaddik who does not do his share in the building is no zaddik at all." (295)

The second one, which is similar to Psalm 92, is from Book One: The Early Masters:

Palm and Cedar

"The righteous [zaddik] shall flourish like the palm-tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." Concerning this verse in the psalm, the maggid of Mezritch

said: "There are two kinds of zaddikim. Some spend their time on mankind. They teach them and take trouble about them. Others concern themselves only with the teachings themselves. The first bear nourishing fruit, like the date-palm; the second are like the cedar: lofty and unfruitful." (101)

It is my hope that this issue captures the impact that Arnett's scholarship, friendship, and practices have had throughout his many years of service in the academy. Selfishly, I was not ready for him to retire, but I recognize the importance of retiring when one is healthy and at the top of one's game. This is the mark of his retirement. I wish him many wonderful years of retirement to engage in leisure and play with his grandchildren.

We, of this journal, recognize and celebrate the contribution of Ronald C. Arnett's work to the scholarly community and beyond.

Onward.

References

Buber, Martin. 1991. *Tales of the Hasidim*. New York: Schocken Books.