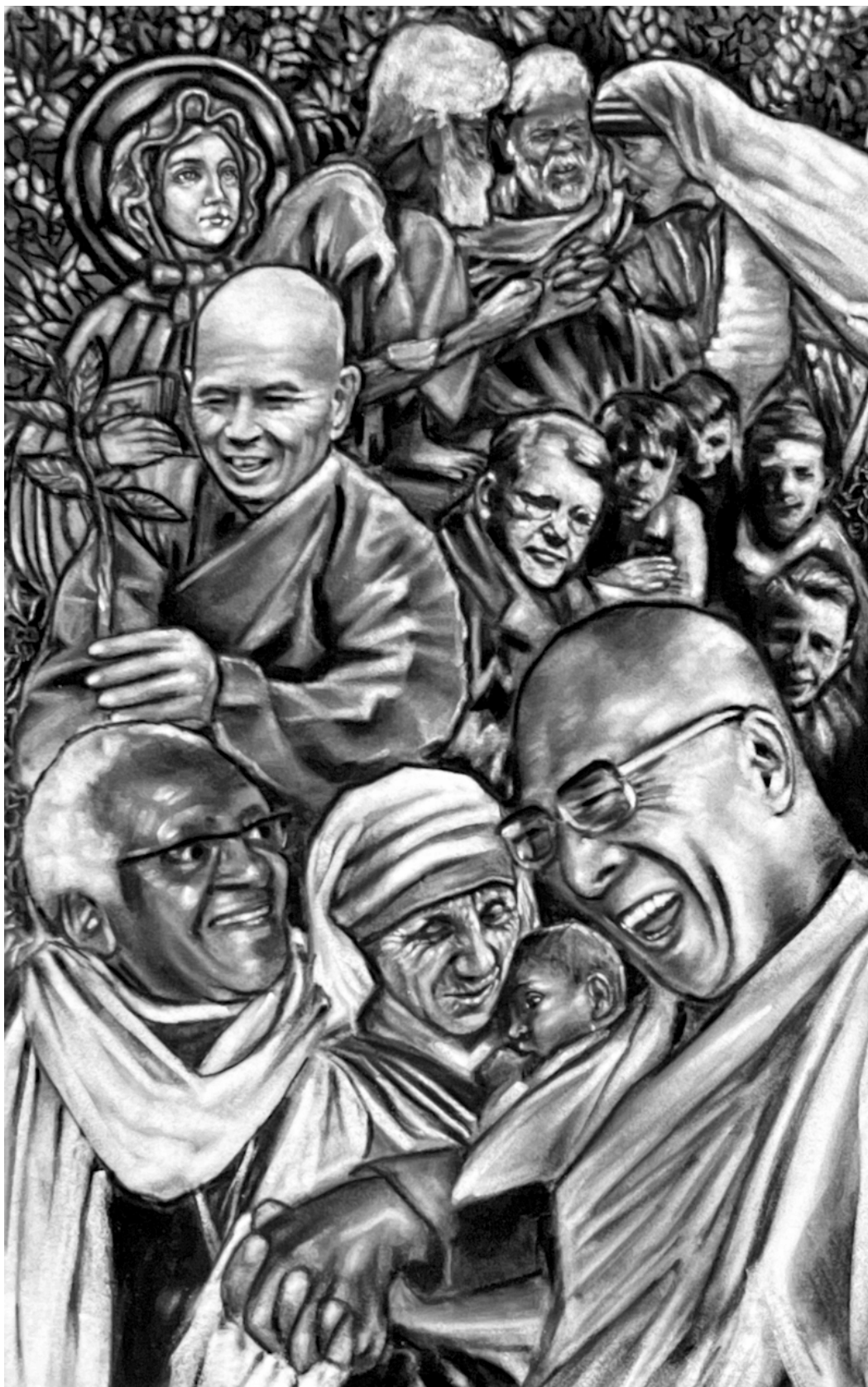


**THE JOURNAL OF DIALOGIC ETHICS:  
Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives**



# THE JOURNAL OF DIALOGIC ETHICS: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives

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# THE JOURNAL OF DIALOGIC ETHICS: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives

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# THE JOURNAL OF DIALOGIC ETHICS: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives

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## Editorial Introduction

# The Heart of the Issue: Ronald C. Arnett's Scholarly Tenacity

Annette M. Holba

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This issue of the *Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives* continues the theme of the celebration of Ronald C. Arnett's contribution to the field of communication and other disciplinary fields of study through his dialogic teaching, scholarship, and service. In this celebratory issue, there are multiple perspectives ranging from direct scholarly discussions about Arnett's work to employment of the metaphors that drove his scholarship and engagement.

In the first essay, "Dialogic Scholarship as the Praxis of Tenacious Hope: A Review of the Monographs of Ronald C. Arnett," Michael R. Kearney and Susan Mancino write as two former graduate assistants, now successful college professors in their own right, who worked under the tutelage of Arnett in the PhD program in rhetoric at Duquesne University. This essay focuses on six single-authored books that Arnett published with Southern Illinois University Press, including the book that announced the metaphor of tenacious hope, *Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope: Contemporary Implications of the Scottish Enlightenment*, which was published in 2022. Kearney and Mancino embrace the metaphor of tenacious hope, situated as the praxis of Arnett's dialogic scholarship. Also in this essay, Kearney and Mancino apply Calvin O. Schrag's (1986) communicative praxis coordinates of *by*, *about*, and *for* to Arnett's scholarly engagement. They state directly to readers that they want to offer a story of dialogic communication scholarship that is *by* Arnett, *about* his ideas, and *for* others. This essay demonstrates the interrelation between teacher, student, and colleague.

The second essay in this collection, "Tenacious Hope in Hollow Modernity: Respiratory Revelations," continues the metaphor thread of tenacious hope as Özüm Üçok-Sayrak develops a dialogic connection between tenacious hope and the revelatory. The essay employs several of Arnett's well-developed metaphors, including derivative agency, attentiveness, and existential homelessness, as well as his critique of individualism, pointing to what Özüm Üçok-Sayrak refers to as

a theme at the heart of Arnett's work—the revelatory. Üçok-Sayrak enters this conversation through the notion of tenacious hope, situating it as a revelatory phenomenon connected to the current historical moment. She suggests that this particular historical moment can be described as “hollow modernity,” referencing that this moment is post Zygmunt Bauman's (2000, 2005) announcement of liquid modernity. Üçok-Sayrak describes how hollow modernity offers a disembodied presence in an environment of excess stimuli and the experience of a loss of the freedom of attention and empathy. Üçok-Sayrak argues that this environment feeds the condition of thoughtlessness and a disposition lacking discernment. Üçok-Sayrak states that she is providing an initial sketch of a respiratory philosophy of communication ethics that reveals the breath and the need for breathing as necessary for participation in the world.

In the third essay, “Arnett's Existentialist Call: Attending to the Ground, Soil, and the Mud of Everyday Life,” Matthew P. Mancino explores how existential philosophy informs Arnett's thinking around dialogic ethics and philosophy of communication in interpersonal communication. Mancino invites existential philosophers into conversation to provide for the field of communication a textured understanding of how existential philosophy informs Arnett's work. Mancino makes the case that Arnett attends to the lived experience and embodiment of individuals as they navigate the world with others. Mancino explores how Arnett uses the metaphors of ground, soil, and mud of everyday life, referencing the dialogic philosophy of Martin Buber as a guide through Arnett's thinking and doing. This illuminates the importance of existential philosophy for the communication discipline and, in particular, a better understanding of human interactions and interpersonal relationships.

In the next essay, “Corporate Communication Leadership and Ethics in the Mud of Everyday Life,” Fr. Lazarus Langbiir, CSSp, situates Arnett's concept of tenacious hope in the mud of everyday life. Langbiir identifies the need to be attentive to the effects that strategic corporate communication decisions can have on the everyday lives of people who are situated within their own narratives and stories. Langbiir acknowledges that the purpose of his essay is truly to honor the work and legacy of Arnett's scholarship, especially around communication ethics and corporate communication leadership. Langbiir suggests that communication in corporate and organizational settings is where the rubber meets the road in that it speaks to ordinary people working in their everyday lives and dealing with the challenges that come and go in a corporate organizational setting, especially involving leadership. Langbiir suggests that communication in this setting must tend to the mud of everyday life because, at any given time, people within an organization are entangled in challenging or difficult situations. This takes an authentic commitment to working with others, especially for leaders within their contexts.

The next essay, penned by Richard H. Thames, is entitled “The Wild Child and the Voice of the Other.” Thames is a skilled storyteller. He wrote and inscribed this essay “For Ron Arnett.” Arnett's friend and colleague over many years, Thames offers a poetic, Burkean essay around language and the other. Thames references “the wild child,” recalling the 1970 discovery of a thirteen-year-old girl

from Los Angeles, California, who was so isolated by her parents that she never learned to speak as other children learned. The wild child was not called into language by the voices of others. As Thames argues, she only learned to hear language; she could not speak it because she was not called into it by a certain age. This is a beautiful essay *for* Arnett, *by* his dear colleague and scholar Thames, and *about* language, the other, and more particularly the embodied voice of the other as an ethical commitment to the other. The approach Thames takes to this essay demonstrates Schrag's communicative praxis as discussed in the essay by Kearney and Mancino.

I am pleased to present the last two essays as a form of dialogic scholarly engagement around a book review. Melba Vèlez-Ortiz's review of *Human Dialogue*, volume 5 of *Towards a Universal Civilization*, lays out and explores ideas involving human reality and human excellence as being tied to one's humanity. We then have a response to the review by the author of the book, Michael H. Mitias. *Human Dialogue* provides an interesting and thoughtful discussion about dialogue, the human condition, and human communication in general. We are very grateful that we could have this dialogic exchange of ideas between reviewer and author.

Ronald C. Arnett is a formidable scholar committed to opening spaces for all voices in dialogue with one another. The spirit of Arnett's scholarship is ever present in this issue. The importance of dialogue, its impact, and its praxis will continue to shape and reshape, be formed and informed by contributors to the body of dialogic scholarship as we move into the future. Arnett's voice is a cornerstone of this scholarship.

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## Dialogic Scholarship as the Praxis of Tenacious Hope: A Review of the Monographs of Ronald C. Arnett

Michael R. Kearney  
Susan Mancino

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**Abstract:** This essay offers a reflection on Ronald C. Arnett’s scholarly career. Informed by our experiences working with him as graduate research assistants in the Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies at Duquesne University, we summarize the achievements in his curriculum vitae and review his six single-authored books published by Southern Illinois University Press. Our interpretive exploration of Arnett’s contributions to communication scholarship relies upon Calvin O. Schrag’s (1986) notion of communicative praxis to emphasize the *by*, *about*, and *for* of scholarly engagement. We texture Schrag’s appreciation of communicative praxis with the metaphors of narrative, dialogue, and tenacious hope evident in Arnett’s published work and pedagogical commitments. In this review, we offer a story of dialogic communication scholarship by Arnett, about ideas, and for others.

**Keywords:** communication scholarship; dialogic editing; praxis; Arnett, Ronald C.

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“Dialogic ethics is a charge of responsibility for learning about difference, working with differences, and respecting those different from ourselves—protecting the differences of partiality that matter. The ethical prescription for today is tenacious hope, driven not by metaphysical ideology or strategic technique, but by honest admission of partiality and responsive attentiveness to the revelatory, the unexpected. The hope for this current hour resides in a dialogic ethics based on learning akin to a master of jazz who understands the confines of a given piece and then interacts creatively with what is present, transforming the given without dishonoring its proper importance and power.”  
—Ronald C. Arnett (2018b, 280–81)

“Dialogic editing is a model of integrality in practice. It provides value for the individuals involved in the experience of active, ethical, and innovative thinkers together. It not only redefines the entire editing process by having an

inclusive process, but it also cultivates skills and tools for a lifetime of working with others. Dialogic editing can help to develop one's identity around shared understanding, shared responsibility, and shared experiences grounded in collective moral imaginaries."  
— Annette M. Holba (2024, 49)

Recent issues of the *Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives* have celebrated the legacy of Ronald C. Arnett as a scholar, administrator, and teacher. This essay arises from our recollections as graduate assistants who worked with Arnett in the culminating years of his career at Duquesne University. As we drafted this article together, we both found ourselves drawn back to countless shared experiences of sitting in College Hall 340, the main office of the Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies at Duquesne University, waiting for our research meetings to begin. Students and faculty members would bustle in and out of the main office, picking up books, making copies, or getting coffee, forming relationships through the everyday work of the graduate program. This formative experience exposed us to the disciplined research practices of a prolific author who was named a Distinguished Scholar by the National Communication Association in 2017. Here, we seek to connect a survey of Arnett's monographs with observations about his unique way of nurturing a tenacious commitment to dialogic scholarship as professional praxis.

## Introduction

Arnett's scholarly career reveals coordinates of dialogic ethical praxis in interpretive communication research. Communicative praxis, as described by Calvin O. Schrag (1986), highlights communication as *by* someone, *about* something, and *for* someone. Applying this work to scholarship requires researchers to consider their own situatedness within the world and its impact on inquiry (*by* someone), the theoretical content of research (*about* something), and its public implications (*for* someone). These directives demonstrate Schrag's commitment to understanding praxis as theory-informed action and guide our examination of praxis in communication scholarship.

We align the *by*, *about*, and *for* of communicative praxis with the three coordinates of a narrative, according to Arnett (2002): story, practices, and public support. Arnett conceptualized narrative as broader than story, involving an embodied action orientation that yields an understanding of past, present, and future shared among a community. Elsewhere, we have articulated Arnett's dialogic approach to research as an exemplar of philosophically grounded narrative engagement (Mancino and Kearney 2024). Here, we note how the tripartite nature of narrative can align with the coordinates of communicative praxis. Narrative's emphasis on story legitimizes the *by* of embedded, responsive agency. Its emphasis on practices reflects the significance of the *about* in a story-formed person (Arnett 2005a). Finally, narrative's commitment to the public sphere connects a communicative act to its implications *for* others.

This essay offers a glimpse into our experiences of the *by*, *about*, and *for* of Arnett's corpus as a narrative of dialogic scholarly engagement. Thus, it proceeds in three sections that follow the characteristic themes of communicative praxis and narrative. The first section, "By Arnett: A Story-Formed Scholarly Career," reviews Arnett's professional biography and curriculum vitae. The second section, "About Ideas: Practices of Dialogic Scholarship," identifies praxes of dialogic communication scholarship in each of Arnett's single-authored books. The third section, "For Others: Reflections and Implications," draws upon everyday practices of dialogic research to understand how they shape the engagement of this form of inquiry in communication studies. Throughout this account, we hope to emphasize the connections between communicative praxis and the significance of narrative for interpreting the legacy of Arnett's contributions to the fields of communication and dialogue. These connections also point toward public, action-oriented implications for engaging in the ongoing pursuit of dialogic communication research.

### **By Arnett: A Story-Formed Scholarly Career**

At the time of his retirement in 2022, Arnett's scholarly biography in the archives of the Communication Ethics Institute read as follows:

Ronald C. Arnett (PhD, Ohio University, 1978) is Professor Emeritus and former Chair of the Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies, the Patricia Doherty Yoder and Ronald Wolfe Endowed Chair in Communication Ethics (2015–2022), and the Henry Koren, C.S.Sp., Endowed Chair for Scholarly Excellence (2010–2015) at Duquesne University. He has coedited seven books and authored/coauthored twelve books, most recently *Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope: Contemporary Implications of the Scottish Enlightenment* (2022). He is the recipient of nine book awards, including the 2022 Top Book Award from the National Communication Association's Communication Ethics Division for *Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope: Contemporary Implications of the Scottish Enlightenment*, the 2017 Top Book Award from the National Communication Association's Communication Ethics Division and 2017 Distinguished Book Award from the National Communication Association's Philosophy of Communication Division for his book *Levinas's Rhetorical Demand: The Unending Obligation of Communication Ethics*, and the 2013 Top Book Award for *Communication Ethics in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt's Rhetoric of Warning and Hope* from the National Communication Association's Communication Ethics Division. In 2017, he was named Distinguished Scholar by the National Communication Association. He is the recipient of the 2013 Presidential Award for Excellence in Scholarship from Duquesne University and is the recipient of the 2005 Scholar of the Year Award from the Religious Communication Association. Arnett was named Centennial Scholar of Communication and Centennial Scholar of Philosophy of Communication by the Eastern Communication Association in 2009 and received its Distinguished Service Award in 2019. Arnett has completed three editorships for the *Journal of Communication and Religion* and is the former editor of the *Review of Communication*. He has also

served as the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Communication Association, Executive Director of the Eastern Communication Association, and President of the Semiotic Society of America.

This biography highlights central accomplishments that positioned Arnett as a leading scholar within the field of communication, particularly among the subfields of communication ethics, philosophy of communication, and dialogic ethics. A story-informed review of his curriculum vitae offers additional texture that provides insight into the *by* of Arnett's scholarly corpus. Our account is divided into three subsections that reveal points of meaning in the story of his career: "Mentoring," "Institutional Homes," and "Scholarly Shifts." Each subsection ends with summary insights that inform our understanding of Arnett's narrative engagement of communicative praxis.

### *Mentoring*

Arnett attributed his interests in dialogue and philosophy of communication to the influence of his undergraduate and graduate mentors. Arnett graduated from Manchester College (now Manchester University) in 1974 with a BS in psychology. There, Arnett studied under Paul Keller, which led to a mentoring relationship that continued into Arnett's scholarly career. Keller's book *Monologue to Dialogue* (1973), coauthored with Charles T. Brown, was one of the earliest interpersonal communication textbooks as well as one of the first sources to advocate for dialogue as a communicative orientation. Arnett frequently referenced the mentorship of Keller. For instance, he provided a dedication to him in the *Manchester College Bulletin of the Peace Studies Institute* (Arnett 1983b).

Arnett also repeatedly expressed his admiration and gratitude for his undergraduate professor Paul Boase and his dissertation director Ray Wagner. Arnett offered three presentations in honor of Boase at Speech Communication Association (SCA)/National Communication Association (NCA) conferences in 1996, 2001, and 2003 (Arnett 1996; Arnett 2001b; Arnett and Arneson 2003). In 2016, Arnett received the Paul H. Boase Prize for Scholarship from the Ohio Communication Association. His address for that occasion acknowledged Boase and Wagner as teachers and friends: "I roomed with [Boase] at conferences for over twenty years often when I had no money and he assisted with payment. . . . My Masters [sic] thesis and dissertation director was Ray Wagner. I owe my scholarly engagement in the field of communication largely to Paul and Ray. I am thankful" (Arnett 2016, 45). Arnett received an MA from Ohio University in 1975, majoring in interpersonal communication with a minor in counseling, and a PhD from the same institution in 1978, majoring in interpersonal communication and minoring in philosophy. At Ohio University, Arnett also studied with Algis Mickunas, whom he credited as one of the three foundational scholars of philosophy of communication (Arnett 2017b). Mickunas (2017) wrote the foreword to Arnett's book on Emmanuel Levinas, signaling their ongoing relationship. Arnett's early works offer traces of his mentors' voices that have persisted throughout his corpus.

By the end of his writing career, Arnett also included the voices of those he was mentoring. For instance, a 2014 article coauthored with a former undergraduate teaching assistant, Sarah (Flinko) DeJuliis, references Arnett's experience as an undergraduate teaching assistant for Keller (Flinko and Arnett 2014). Arnett later coauthored a book on crisis communication leadership with DeJuliis and another graduate student, Matthew Corr (Arnett, DeJuliis, and Corr 2017). This was not the first book coauthored with graduate student mentees: Arnett had invited Leeanne Bell McManus into the writing of *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference* (2009) as a graduate student and later coauthored *Conflict between Persons: The Origins of Leadership* (2014) with McManus and a former student, Amanda McKendree. Following his retirement, Arnett invited two more graduate students to contribute in his place to new editions of these texts—Michael R. Kearney to the third edition of *Communication Ethics Literacy* (Fritz, McManus, and Kearney 2023) and Preston Carmack to the third edition of *Conflict between Persons*, which is currently underway.

Arnett also involved former students in dialogic scholarly engagement as they established their own communication careers. For instance, he wrote *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age: Community, Hope, and Interpersonal Relationships* (1999) with Pat Arneson, a former student at St. Cloud State University who later taught alongside him at Duquesne, and *An Overture to Philosophy of Communication: The Carrier of Meaning* (2012) with Annette M. Holba, a former Duquesne student. Notably, Holba assumed editorship of the *Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives* upon Arnett's retirement. These examples provide just a sample of a practice of scholarly invitation that is a characteristic aspect of Arnett's dialogic approach, presenting communicative praxis as an ongoing narrative engagement of mentoring and exploring ideas.

The practice of mentoring is notable, both as it informed Arnett's scholarly pursuits and as it relates to the story that shaped the narrative of his dialogic scholarly engagement. The dialogic nature of mentoring is evident throughout his writings, echoing the voices of those who mentored him and those he mentored. The practice of mentoring offers an invitation into dialogic scholarly engagement, the profession/vocation, and the importance of institutional homes.

### *Institutional Homes*

Positionality, including one's institutional situatedness, matters in philosophical understandings of narrative and communicative praxis (Arnett and Arneson 1999; Fritz 2013). Arnett's career included positions in four institutional homes: (a) faculty member at St. Cloud State University from 1977 to 1984; (b) department chair and faculty member at Marquette University from 1984 to 1987; (c) vice president/dean and faculty member at Manchester College from 1987 to 1993; and (d) department chair and faculty member in the Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies at Duquesne University from 1993 to 2022. Arnett's situatedness within these institutions provided meaningful context for his work. His curriculum vitae includes multiple contributions to Manchester College publications (Arnett 1983a, 1989a, 1989b) and to Duquesne University's *Spiritana*

*Horizons: A Journal of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit* (Arnett 2011, 2014c, 2020). Arnett's inclination to publish in venues aligned with mission, not the field of communication alone, signaled his appreciation for local institutional homes in cultivating a dialogic ethic of education.

Endowed chairs, which recognize faculty excellence tied to the interests and values of a university and a donor, further illustrate the importance of institutional situatedness in Arnett's career. Arnett held two endowed chairs while working at Duquesne University. Arnett's position as the inaugural recipient of the Henry Koren, C.S.Sp., Endowed Chair in Scholarly Excellence was succeeded by the creation of a new chair, the Patricia Doherty Yoder and Ronald Wolfe Endowed Chair in Communication Ethics. Notably, the Koren chair was tailored to general scholarly influence, while the Yoder–Wolfe endowed chair signified institutional validation of communication ethics as a scholarly area of prominence.

Arnett involved himself in scholarship that nourished a sense of place, displaying a commitment that moved beyond the desire for career advancement alone. Arnett was acutely aware that institutions matter, providing the ground from which work occurs (Arnett 1992; Bellah et al. 1985, 1991). Just as the practice of mentoring shapes scholarly direction, institutional homes offer invitations for considering mission-oriented concerns that provide opportunities for contributing from the distinctiveness of one's story-informed perspective. Tracing Arnett's publication record offers insight into scholarly shifts that reflect these dialogic invitations.

### *Scholarly Shifts*

Arnett's first monograph, *Dwell in Peace* (1980), presents the fruits of his dissertation research on nonviolence and dialogic communication. *Dwell in Peace* profoundly influenced Arnett's career and reflected indebtedness to his mentors. *Dwell in Peace* contended that doing violence to others can occur on an everyday level of communicative exchange. Drawing deeply upon the dialogic tradition, Arnett invoked the work of philosophers like Martin Buber, Maurice Friedman, and Viktor Frankl to stress both the difficulty and the value of a commitment to nonviolent peacemaking in everyday relationships. Selections from this book were later reprinted in the third and fourth editions of John Stewart's *Bridges Not Walls* and in an anthology published by the Church of the Brethren (Brumbaugh-Cayford 2017). The book was also adapted into a discussion guide by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (Knudsen-Hoffman, n.d.). In *Dwell in Peace*, Arnett laid a theoretical foundation for what he would later articulate as a dialogic communication ethic.

Arnett's research on dialogic approaches in the field of communication was consistently guided by Buber's unique perspective, which emerged as a recurring theme in his dissertation and subsequent writings. His 1981 article "Toward a Phenomenological Dialogue," published in the *Western Journal of Communication*, propelled a significant scholarly exchange with Rob Anderson regarding differing interpretations of Buber's dialogic approach (Anderson 1982; Arnett 1982). Arnett considered Anderson a colleague rather than an ideological opponent; they went

on to coedit a book with Kenneth N. Cissna that presented and explored major texts across the dialogic tradition (Anderson, Cissna, and Arnett 1994). Arnett's careful differentiation of his reading of Buber from Anderson's emphasized the vital importance of multiple perspectives on dialogue and paved the way for Arnett's 1986 text *Communication and Community: Implications of Martin Buber's Dialogue* published by Southern Illinois University Press, which provided institutional ground for the progression and development of Arnett's scholarship.

While Buber's influence on Arnett extended before and after his 1986 work, his commitment to learning from the unfamiliar kept him from developing a singular reputation as a Buberian scholar. Such learning, in turn, prompted him to revisit some of his early contentions about Buber. For instance, Arnett moved from a primarily negative view of monologue in 1986 to multiple journal articles acknowledging the necessity of monologue for dialogic engagement (Arnett 2012, 2014a, 2015). The rise of social polarization in the decades since the publication of *Communication and Community* demonstrates the continued timeliness of the book, yet Arnett resisted confusing the temporal nature of scholarship with monolithic unchanging assertions.

Arnett's interests in communication ethics and philosophy of communication forged a path through multiple and diverse regions of learning. At the point of publication of *Communication and Community*, Arnett had published at least fifteen academic articles and three book reviews and had given at least ten academic presentations, mostly dealing with themes of dialogue, ethics, and conflict. His 1987 essay "The Hurried Professor: What Is Our Disciplinary Responsibility?" published in the *Minnesota Speech Communication Journal* focused these interests by pointing toward a locally grounded, institutionally rooted ethic of participation in the project of higher education. The question "What is our disciplinary responsibility?" prefigured Arnett's 1992 work *Dialogic Education: Conversation about Ideas and between Persons*, reprinted in 1997.

*Dialogic Education* arises out of a moment of crisis, of questioning the continued value of the narrative of higher education and a teacher's ability to find meaningful vocational work within it. Arnett's vision of higher education as a troubled community builds upon his earlier work on Buber. This conception of communities of higher education emerges around common centers committed to ideas (for example, the significance of faculty research and the distinctiveness of education beyond information acquisition), people (for example, faculty-student dynamics and the protection and promotion of college stakeholder relationships), and places (for example, the physical and virtual spaces of a campus that provide ground for learning, connection, and deliberation). *Dialogic Education* articulates the ongoing relevance of these common centers under threat. Though situated in the early 1990s, Arnett's response to crises in higher education speaks to recurring questions today, from declining enrollments to questions of affordability, record-level student debt, college closures, an influx of short-term faculty contracts, the elimination of tenure, and the politicization of curriculum and content. *Dialogic Education* recommends practices that can continue to benefit communities of higher education.

In the years between *Dialogic Education* and *Dialogic Confession: Bonhoeffer's Rhetoric of Responsibility* (2005a), Arnett coauthored a work on dialogic civility with Pat Arneson (Arnett and Arneson 1999) and coedited two books on communication ethics and dialogue (Anderson, Cissna, and Arnett 1994; Makau and Arnett 1997). Arnett (2001a) also authored a major article for the international journal *Communication Theory* advancing dialogic civility as pragmatic ethical praxis, moving an interpersonal metaphor into the public domain. Surveying the development of his scholarship over the span of more than a decade, we note two broad shifts: a philosophically rich articulation of "metaphor" for the communication discipline and a growing emphasis on religious communication scholarship as dialogue emerging from monologic narrative ground.

These scholarly interests have an interdependent and reflexive connection to the development of the doctoral program in rhetoric in the Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies at Duquesne University. Under Arnett's departmental leadership, the program emerged with a dual mission: "The Ethical Difference" and "Walking the Humanities into the Marketplace." In an essay detailing the latter motto, Arnett (2003c) called for a dialogic engagement between the humanities and the marketplace beyond capitalist exchange; the key was the public domain of issues and ideas in contention. Arnett's administrative experiences within the department and doctoral program informed the direction of his scholarship.

As Arnett's career progressed, he continued to seek out new thinkers, whom he read for the first time even as he revisited authors who had shaped his earlier works. The blending of authorial perspectives demonstrates Umberto Eco's (2005) notion of hypertextuality, emphasizing the creative potential of revisiting an old text from a new vantage point. For instance, Arnett's (1985a, 1985b) early writings on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's peacemaking and nonviolence laid a foundation for a book project two decades later that articulated communication ethics implications of Bonhoeffer's life and scholarship (Arnett 2005a). The metaphor that Arnett chose for the book title, *Dialogic Confession*, emerged only after long engagement with Bonhoeffer's ideas, highlighting the revelatory and temporal nature of scholarly insight.

Notably, Arnett did not turn to Bonhoeffer to uncover religious communication, but his engagement with Bonhoeffer led him in this direction. The dialogic confession of texts speaking reveals different insights to its readers. For instance, the writings of Buber or Levinas could have revealed religious communication insight. However, Arnett's engagement with these texts guided his research toward different implications. In this way, approaching texts with the revelatory spirit of dialogic communicative praxis produces a mode of inquiry that is distinct from an argument-oriented approach that turns to a book with the presupposition of prescribed implications. While each mode of research can produce meaningful insight, the former demonstrates a dialogic engagement of learning from others.

In the eight years between *Dialogic Confession* and *Communication Ethics in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt's Rhetoric of Warning and Hope* (2013), Arnett's scholarly output generally accelerated, due in large part to his first endowed chair. His

publications showed an increasing turn toward philosophy of communication and its emphasis on historicity (e.g., Arnett 2010a). Along with Buber and Bonhoeffer, Arnett maintained longstanding regard for Hannah Arendt, presenting a conference paper on her as early as 2003 (Arnett 2003a) and publishing a book chapter on her thought in 2007 (Arnett 2007b). The Arendt book project demanded extensive historical context, above and beyond previous works. Arendt's situatedness at a juncture of modern and postmodern perspectives resonated with Arnett's understanding of the complexity of contending dialogic perspectives.

Arnett's next book, *Levinas's Rhetorical Demand: The Unending Obligation of Communication Ethics* (2017), continued this exploration of dialogic perspectives and historicity. Emmanuel Levinas offered an acknowledged alternative position to Buber. Arnett's exploration of the divergent dialogic strands of Buber and Levinas occurred over decades: his first public presentation on Levinas occurred in 1999 as an NCA seminar, and his first publication on Levinas appeared in 2003 (Arnett 2003b). While both Levinas and Buber worked in a phenomenological tradition, they offered distinctive perceptions on the dialogic role of reciprocity. While this debate was not the sole focus of the text, Levinas's unending, nonreciprocal, and immemorial ethical demand of responsibility guided and extended Arnett's examination of dialogue. Arnett's dialogic research embraced nuanced differences and their distinctive revelatory insights in ways that foreshadowed his textured examination of the variations present within the movement commonly understood as the Scottish Enlightenment.

Arnett published two essays on the Scottish Enlightenment as well as encyclopedia entries on Hume, Reid, and Smith prior to *Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope: Contemporary Implications of the Scottish Enlightenment* in 2022 (Arnett 2014a, 2014b, 2018a, 2018c, 2018d). His interest in the Scottish Enlightenment directed his research beyond the study of a single scholar toward a historical consideration of multiple strands of enlightenment thought. Arnett understood the Enlightenment as a herald of modernity, which he had critiqued in his Arendt book as a "secular trinity" of efficiency, progress, and individual autonomy (Arnett 2013, 4). However, Arnett also recognized the presence of tenacious hope in aspects of the Scottish Enlightenment that upheld narrative ground. For example, he valued Adam Ferguson's ability to navigate competing narratives through leadership at the juncture of Highland and Lowland cultures while simultaneously lamenting what he called the "dark side" of the Scottish Enlightenment, which espoused conjectural history, a universal conception of rationality, and European superiority. Similar to his reading of Levinas, Arnett's dialogic scholarly engagement with the Scottish Enlightenment employed a constructive hermeneutic without ideological adoption.

Shortly following the publication of *Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope*, Arnett retired. This book leaves the field of communication with its central metaphor: tenacious hope. Unlike undiscerning optimism, tenacious hope engages dialogic communicative praxis in its persistent commitment to gaining literacy about a historical moment in order to understand the urgent issues of the twenty-first century. This dedication to an intellectual appetite was not guided by information acquisition but a desire to strengthen human communities in the

midst of narrative contention and “existential homelessness” (Arnett 1994). In this way, we see Arnett’s consistent concern with the interests of his earliest publications that nonetheless grew with the insights of all that he read and wrote throughout his career. The dialogic sense of his scholarship privileged “writ[ing] to learn” rather than writing to tell (Arnett 2007a, 65).

These scholarly shifts reveal meaningful insights into the story of Arnett’s scholarly career that reflect mentoring and institutional homes. Together, our focus on the practice of mentoring, the situatedness of institutional homes, and the shifts in Arnett’s publications construct a narrative-informed conception of his scholarship as a dialogic engagement of communicative praxis. His work engaged dialogue with others—those who taught him, those he taught, the institutions where he worked, and the texts he read. The next section of our article considers the *about* of communication praxis through closer examination of Arnett’s monographs.

## About Ideas: Practices of Dialogic Scholarship

As noted in the previous section, Arnett recognized institutions as goods worthy of protection and promotion. He emphasized the ways in which institutions provide narrative ground under persons’ feet in the midst of communicative action. As we transition into an examination of Arnett’s single-authored scholarly books, we focus on the six texts published by Southern Illinois University Press, which provided a research home for Arnett throughout his various academic appointments. Our goal is not to offer a comprehensive summary of the texts or to present novel interpretive insights but rather to select a particular practice of dialogic scholarship evident in each one. While these practices are not unique to Arnett alone, they reveal practices of dialogic scholarly engagement as a form of communicative praxis.

### 1. Communication and Community: *Staying Close to the Text*

In *Communication and Community* (1986), Arnett examines Buber’s work on dialogue as it encourages constructive communities in response to intensifying polarization. As noted earlier, this work built upon Arnett’s interest in nonviolent peacemaking while simultaneously laying the foundation for his entrance into philosophy of communication and dialogic ethics. Here, Arnett initiated a custom of beginning each chapter with an epigraph from the author being studied—in this case, Buber. In later books, Arnett would juxtapose one quote from the philosopher under study with a quote from a communication scholar. These epigraphs emphasize the nature of interpretive scholarship as a dialogic entrance into an ongoing conversation about ideas.

The primary dialogic scholarly practice that we discern from *Communication and Community* is the importance of staying close to a text. Presenting a significant quote at the head of each chapter expresses respect for the original text, reminding writers and readers not to equate a secondary author’s ideas with a pure representation of the source. In his introduction, Arnett

embraces Buber's description of utopia as a form of imagining that invites interpretive possibilities. This understanding of utopia contrasts with Arnett's critique of optimism or fantasy in later works (e.g., Arnett 2022). From Buber's perspective, utopias call forth imaginative action that builds off of the real rather than the abstract. Beginning scholarship with deference to a primary source opens up imaginative possibilities grounded in lived experience and the reality of what has already been written. *Communication and Community* offers a vision of community and dialogue that is utopian in this Buberian sense; Arnett ends without a universal solution to the communicative problems faced at that historical moment, but he stresses that we need to revisit the works and insights of primary texts. Phenomenological perspectives of dialogue, such as those offered by Buber and Arnett, remind us that the conversation began long before our entrance and requires attention to the voices of those who came before us. A researcher needs to be familiar with the scholarly conversation before speaking into it. This awareness is of principal significance as we keep the conversation going because dialogue is worth the risk.

## 2. Dialogic Education: *Meeting an Existential Question*

*Dialogic Education* (1992) reexamines the vocational value of education at a juncture of personal and professional scrutiny. Arnett (2005b) provides an exemplar of revelatory inquiry inspired by disappointment amid the "mud of everyday life" (350), rather than a scholastic interest in inventing questions for idle contemplation or career advancement through possession of ideas. *Dialogic Education* incorporates plentiful first-person accounts without moving into autoethnographic scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Arnett's insights and experiences in higher education and conflict resolution inform his work without lying at the center of the project. Instead, theoretical insights allow the researcher to be present in the research as the carrier of a narrative, the upholder of a theory. The book moves into a narrative-informed structure that decenters but does not discredit the self. The book uses dialogic theory to respond to systemic crises in a variety of educational communities.

The primary dialogic scholarly practice that we discern from *Dialogic Education* is meeting an existential question posed by the historical moment. Historical moments are characterized by the shared encounter of questions that demand our attention and response. Arnett's encounter with the crises of higher education prompted this book; his response acknowledges his own experience without relying upon it or denying the communal questions posed by such a moment. Indeed, such moments of existential questioning enter the public sphere

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<sup>1</sup> We consider this book a structural outlier among Arnett's monographs in that it is not focused around a given philosopher of communication like his monographs on Buber, Bonhoeffer, Arendt, and Levinas, nor does it offer chapters focused on a given philosopher of communication as seen in his most recent book on the Scottish Enlightenment (a structure that is also characteristic of *Dialogic Civility* and *An Overture to Philosophy of Communication*). Nonetheless, like Arnett's other monographs, *Dialogic Education* remains an exemplar of dialogic scholarly praxis.

through mission statements that guide organizations and communities in moments of crisis. In higher education, the mission of an institution guides “conversation about ideas” between and among faculty, students, administrators, and staff. These conversations inform the narrative ground of an institution that can fuel the creative impetus of teaching, learning, and research. Meeting an existential question engages a narrative approach by addressing issues that are shared among communities. While the particularity of vantage point matters and gives voice to a perspective, existential questions and historical moments offer points of application and insight that interact dialogically with others.

### 3. Dialogic Confession: *Acknowledging Others*

In *Dialogic Confession* (2005a), Arnett explored Bonhoeffer’s legacy as a person of faith tenaciously meeting a country and a world that diverged from his hopes and expectations. The “Acknowledgments” section of the book stands out from others by thanking “all those who work from a story of conviction with the courage to meet, listen to, and learn from stories contrary to their own” (xv). The distinctiveness of these acknowledgments reminds us of Michael Hyde’s (2006) description of the communicative act of acknowledgment as a “life-giving gift.” In the act of acknowledgement as a form of public confession, Arnett here particularly points to the interplay of conviction, monologue, and the yielding of dialogue without surrendering a position of conviction.

The primary dialogic scholarly practice that we discern from *Dialogic Confession* is acknowledging others. The standard publishing practices of acknowledgments and references offer opportunity to recognize the contributions of others and their role in shaping a text. These dialogic practices hold narrative value in placing the story of a research project within the broader scope of scholarly communities. Acknowledgments and a works cited page or bibliography confess “this is how I got here,” while issues of plagiarism and self-plagiarism represent a failure to confess. Notably, these two scholarly acts of dialogic confession (acknowledging and referencing) routinely appear directly prior to a text’s introduction or foreword and immediately following its conclusion. These components of scholarly writing exist outside of a book’s message but are of particular importance in understanding how a text interacts with the ideas of others. Both components engage communicative praxis as an acknowledgment of the influence of others’ presence and/or ideas in the development of a work. The scholarly act of acknowledgment reflects story-centered experiences emplotted within the message of a text.

### 4. Communication Ethics in Dark Times: *The Revelatory Potential of Historical Attentiveness*

*Communication Ethics in Dark Times* (2013) continued Arnett’s focus on philosophers who wrestled with the possibilities for dialogic engagement in a fragmented world marked by Nazi domination, World War II, and the Holocaust. Arnett engaged Arendt’s critique of the modern era as intimately tied to historical

grounding. Arnett's emphasis on history as a public record situates communicative acts as derivative of the questions characterizing a larger historical moment and reiterates Arendt's commitment to public life as a primary sphere of the human condition. Recognizing that scholarship derives from a particular historical moment contends against an originative self promoting "me" and "my" ideas. Dialogic scholarly communicative praxis seeks the revelatory insights that derive from historical attentiveness; this mode of scholarly inquiry operates in search of "genuine light" rather than the "artificial light" that Arendt warned against, which denies a broader context beyond the researcher alone. Just as historical attentiveness illuminates meaningful scholarly insight, a commitment to editing over time encourages a revisiting of ideas that permits a lack of clarity to guide dialogic insight.

The primary dialogic scholarly practice that we discern from *Communication Ethics in Dark Times* is the revelatory potential of historical attentiveness. Temporal engagement with writing and editing over time allows for this revelatory possibility. Even in the final stages of the book's production, discussions of historical attentiveness persisted in a manner that welcomed the emergence of new insights among the project's page proofs.

##### 5. Levinas's Rhetorical Demand: *The Unending Interplay of Questions and Answers*

*Levinas's Rhetorical Demand* (2017a) wrestles with Levinas's critique of rhetoric, which pivoted on issues of alterity and responsibility. The foreword by Arnett's graduate mentor, Algis Mickunas, notes how Arnett often worked with figures on the margins of the communication field. Mickunas furthers an understanding of fuzzy margins in communication scholarship, with space for negotiating possibilities beyond narrow disciplinary adherence. Arnett's engagement with these figures began with questions that expanded communicative implications in the form of temporally grounded answers. This exchange of questions and answers, which occurs ad infinitum, carries what Levinas describes as a Saying energy preserved in the trace of a published Said. Within Levinas's philosophical project and within the engagement of dialogic scholarship, each Said houses the possibility of new revelatory Saying. Neither Saying nor Said is totally secure. Moving a Saying into a Said in the form of a submission to a journal is a form of courage, allowing one's ideas to assume public form with an invitation for response. In this way, dialogic scholarship demonstrates an unending communication ethics obligation.

The primary dialogic scholarly practice that we discern from *Levinas's Rhetorical Demand* is the constant interplay of questions and answers. Dialogic research begins with questions situated within the communicative praxis of a researcher, disciplinary community, institutional home, and historical moment. This situatedness informs both the research questions brought to texts and the temporal insights discerned in the form of answers. Reflecting the work of Levinas, this scholarly communicative praxis embraces the interplay of Saying and Said, ever attentive to traces that invite the revelatory nature of dialogue. Arnett's work

on Levinas revisits issues shared with the phenomenological tradition of Buber, yet Levinas offered different responses. This scholarly choice stands as a testament to the ongoing significance of these questions and to the value of revisiting them from a variety of perspectives/voices. *Levinas's Rhetorical Demand* illuminates dialogic ethical praxes of interpretive scholarship by engaging in an interplay of Saying and Said in the ongoing exchange between questions and answers. The dialogic nature of this scholarly approach respects the unending "enigma" of texts and ideas, which hold the promise of new revelatory insight.

## 6. Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope: *In Search of Implications*

Arnett framed *Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope* (2022) as an examination of multiple intellectual currents comprising what came to be known as the Scottish Enlightenment. The title of the work emphasized two key points for consideration. The first is tenacious hope as the book's primary communication ethics metaphor, and the second is the subtitle's emphasis on implications, which echoes the subtitle of his book on Buber. The emphasis on implications attends to the rhetorical value of application without assuming that research provides final conclusions. The kaleidoscopic lens of this project opens up more points of dialogue and implications than would have been possible with singular adherence to a particular author. Throughout his engagement of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, Arnett respected the distinctive and situated perspective of each philosopher as they revealed the central questions of the historical moment. Arnett's reading of Scottish philosophers' work appreciated the validity of these questions without assuming the finality of their answers. Instead, Arnett emphasized the emergent implications that reflected a desire to learn rather than tell.

The primary dialogic scholarly practice that we discern from *Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope* is the value of writing in search of implications rather than conclusions. This pursuit is closely tied to research driven by an impulse of questioning. In a recent essay on the centrality of narrative practices to interpretive scholarship, we wrote, "This approach insists that the purpose of research is not to get rid of the question but to gain temporal illumination and clarity that, in turn, propels further questioning" (Mancino and Kearney 2023). Implications provide dialogic responses to research questions with temporal clarity that invites response through additional questioning, keeping the conversation going. An emphasis on implications allows questions to remain with the potential to resurface in novel ways.

The lessons we discerned throughout this section reveal dialogic practices for engaging in scholarly communicative praxis. As we reviewed the content of each of Arnett's single-authored books published by Southern Illinois University Press, we recognized practices that are demonstrated in his works and consistent with the theoretical insights in the content of his scholarship. These insights announce scholarly practices in the narrative of dialogic research and guide our understanding of the *about* in Arnett's communicative praxis.

## For Others: Reflections and Implications

Following the dialogic scholarly practice revealed from our reading of Arnett's final book, *Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope*, our essay also concludes with an emphasis on implications. The implications that we highlight focus on the *for* of communicative praxis, which provides insights about the audiences to whom these works were directed as well as the dialogic practices that accompanied the creation of these research projects.

As noted throughout this essay, Arnett stressed a difference between writing to learn and writing to tell. As he involved research assistants in his scholarly writing projects, we encountered his tenacious faith in the revelatory potential of the editing process. As he drafted book chapters, they became sites of dialogic exchange between the scholars that Arnett cited and his own thinking as he revisited and edited the work. Differences of interpretation or theoretical obscurities afforded invitations for further research and clarification. Arnett (2010b) often used the phrase "going nowhere correctly" to describe scholarship; the clarity of the project often did not appear right away. In fact, the last stages of a book would manifest in an "all of a sudden" kind of effect. Messy drafts would suddenly clear into a significant scholarly contribution. The dialogic nature of his scholarship continued into his exchanges with publishers, editors, and reviewers. Arnett would invite others to share their insights and perspectives for consideration. The title of a book was in constant flux, shifting from one round of revisions to the next and congealing often only after extensive discussions with others. Arnett used the title as a canvas on which to explore different foci of attention.

As part of our review of Arnett's monographs, the titles of these works provided dialogic direction when discerning scholarly practices. The titles reveal meaningful insight significant to the content of the research as well as the practices of dialogic scholarship. In our review, we noted an emphasis on implications in the subtitles of his 1986 book on Buber and his final monograph in 2022. We see this emphasis as a form of scholarly bookends, leading us to think about implications for our own developing careers in the communication discipline. As we conclude this reflective essay, we organize these implications into six broad categories tied to practices we discerned in each of Arnett's monographs.

1. *Dialogic scholarly praxis stays close to a text under consideration.* This scholarly practice explores the interconnections between and among the *by*, *about*, and *for* of a text. There is an interdependent connection between the situatedness of an author, the story-informed content of a work, and the audience for whom it is directed; together, these themes yield narrative insights that guide dialogic scholarly praxis. For this essay, our shared experience as research assistants for Arnett informed our interpretations of the ideas revealed in his texts and in the course of his professional work. Our reflections on this work yielded meaningful insights that directed the practices of our dialogic scholarly engagement.

2. *Dialogic scholarly praxis responds to existential questions.* These questions characterize shared historical moments. Situatedness within these historical

moments matters as it reveals insights that make communicative action meaningful and provide a sense of ground to understand another's standpoint. Communication praxis reminds us that elements of identity matter as embedded agents respond to existential questions that demand our attention and response. For this essay, attentiveness to the existential questions that directed Arnett's scholarly trajectory produced revelatory insights in shaping a story-formed conception of his dialogic scholarly practices.

3. *Dialogic scholarly praxis acknowledges the contributions of others.* In Arnett's educational background and throughout his professional career, we note his continual expressions of gratitude toward mentors and institutional homes. Such acknowledgments also issue a call of responsibility for the next generation of researchers to offer a recognition of who or what has contributed to their own development. For this essay, we are reminded of the significance of Arnett's contribution in the shaping of our dialogic scholarly practices in this essay and our larger research projects.

4. *Dialogic scholarly praxis attends to the revelatory potential of history.* The thoroughness of Arnett's historical attentiveness is apparent throughout his work. As his former research assistants, the expectations of this work taught us a great deal about the significance of historical attentiveness as a ground for dialogic inquiry. Telling the story of a given scholar or event demands textured engagement with historical situatedness to understand standpoint, urgent existential questions, and the evolution of thought. This attentiveness holds revelatory insights that infuse communicative praxis with meaning. For this essay, historical attentiveness revealed the urgent and recurring questions that directed Arnett's research situated as responses to others who informed his thinking; as part of the dialogic nature of scholarly pursuit, his responses continue to inform thinking about these concerns.

5. *Dialogic scholarly praxis participates in an unending interplay of questions and answers.* Arnett pursued an engagement with research that was intentionally piecemeal, inviting interruptions and contributions from others. Approaching texts with the revelatory spirit of dialogic communicative praxis produces a mode of inquiry that is distinct from an argument-oriented approach that turns to a book with the presupposition of prescribed implications. For this essay, the interplay of questions and responses shaped the scholarly shifts that guided our understanding of the story-formed conception of his work. Likewise, we noted Arnett's tendency to revisit lingering questions and find novel answers, temporally situated within the immediacy and particularity of response. This interplay serves as a reminder of the limits of scholarly answers and the persistence of questions that invite ongoing dialogic consideration.

6. *Dialogic scholarly praxis pursues implications for the human community.* To speak without the hypertextual acknowledgement of what others have already said voids phenomenological dialogue and limits insights to the researcher alone by individualistically centering the self. Dialogic approaches to scholarly communicative praxis, however, decenter the self and commit to public deliberation as a necessary and significant component of philosophical hermeneutic inquiry. For this essay, communicative praxis required personal

reflection directed toward public implications. At its best, the doing of dialogic scholarly praxis offers a performative sense of identity situated within guiding public narratives with implications for the human community.

Arnett's dialogic scholarly praxis offers a representative example of the implications of this research approach. Held within the story-formed account of his professional career, the dialogic practices demonstrated by his monographs, and the implications of his work are insights that can continue to direct those interested in this form of scholarly engagement. We are aware of the formative nature of our experience working as Arnett's research assistants; undoubtedly, this experience informed our scholarly communicative praxis in this essay and in our broader research agendas. For this reason, we conclude with gratitude for the undergraduate mentors and experiences that led us to Duquesne University, the profound influence of Arnett and our other graduate mentors, and the support of our present institutional homes. These living exemplars inspire us and call us to ever greater responsibility in the praxis of dialogic scholarly inquiry.

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## Tenacious Hope in Hollow Modernity: Respiratory Revelations

Özüm Üçok-Sayrak

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**Abstract:** Multiple themes from Ronald C. Arnett’s scholarship, including derivative agency, attentiveness, existential homelessness, and his critique of individualism, point to a meta-theme at the heart of his work: the revelatory. This essay highlights Arnett’s notion of tenacious hope as a revelatory phenomenon in connection to this historical moment, which I distinguish as hollow modernity, a moment following Zygmunt Bauman’s (2000, 2005) liquid modernity. Hollow modernity is characterized by disembodied presence, excess of stimuli, and loss of freedom of attention and empathy that feeds thoughtlessness and lack of discernment. I next discuss ethics of attention as an integral part of scholarship on communication ethics that is connected to the revelatory and that needs to be unearthed from its taken-for-granted position. We cannot assume freedom of attention in hollow modernity; rather, it is a matter that needs to be explicitly undertaken in communication research and pedagogy. Finally, I offer initial sketches of a respiratory philosophy of communication ethics that reveals the world by breathing-with—our most intimate and elemental (co)-participation in the world—in connection to tenacious hope that emerges at the limits of thinking, knowing, and hoping.

**Keywords:** tenacious hope; hollow modernity; freedom of attention; ethics of attention; communication ethics; breathing-with

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“No wonder philosophy dies—without air. Did Being, at least, keep some in reserve?”  
—Luce Irigaray (1999, 5)

I am delighted and honored to be here with all of you today in honoring Dr. Ronald C. Arnett’s work and offering this keynote speech as part of the 17th Biennial Communication Ethics Conference: Communication Ethics as Tenacious Hope. I am deeply grateful to know and have worked with Ron, whose presence and scholarship gave me hope and renewed enthusiasm regarding the field of communication studies. Let me start by sharing this quote with you: “It is not enough to think, one also has to breathe. Dangerous are the thinkers who have not breathed enough” (Škof and Berndtson 2018, x). I invite us to wonder about this

quote, and there will be several times I will return to it. For now, let us just wonder . . .

As I was preparing this speech, multiple themes from Arnett's work stood out for me—themes including existential homelessness, derivative agency, attentiveness, critique of progress, and critique of individualism. As I continued reflecting, it occurred to me that all of these themes point to one main theme that I felt was at the heart of all the rest: the revelatory. And so the revelatory as tenacious hope, and tenacious hope as a revelatory phenomenon, will be the focus of my discussion today, along with the other themes in the title of my speech.

Before I start, let me share a recent quote from Ron, part of his response when I emailed him to say that I perceive the revelatory to be the heart of not only his writing and scholarship but also his teaching, and interactions with others, including his jokes. I quote part of his response as my starting point today:

The revelatory is the *heart of dialogue*. It is the reminder that we are *guests in the world*. The West has tried to forget *our existential status*. However, it is *not possible to totally ignore the revelatory*. It emerges in what is termed, "*unintended consequences*." (emphasis added)

Formatting Arnett's words as a poem adds emphasis and feeling tone to the words (the spaces I left in between are for pausing and breathing in):

**The Revelatory**  
is the *heart of dialogue*.  
It is the reminder  
that we are *guests in the world*.

The West has tried to forget  
*our existential status*.

However,  
it is *not possible*  
*to totally ignore*  
*the revelatory*.

It *emerges* in  
what is termed,  
"*unintended consequences*."

So, my main points today are the following: (a) the revelatory is the reminder that we are *guests in the world*; (b) the revelatory is the *heart of dialogue*; and (c) the revelatory *emerges in* what is termed "*unintended consequences*."

## The Revelatory Is the Reminder that We Are Guests in the World

“Neither am I the owner on this earth, nor a tenant,  
I am but a guest for a lifetime.”  
— Erkan Oğur (2016)

In *Dialogic Confession: Bonhoeffer’s Rhetoric of Responsibility*, Arnett (2005) highlights several qualities of being *guests in the world* that form an attitude toward life and the other: humility, hospitality, caution, and responsiveness. A guest is “someone not quite at home” and who assumes “a willingness to attend to the guidelines of the home owner” (53). Rather than operating from a sense of presumed familiarity and knowing, an unassuming attitude accompanied by willingness to learn reflects the hospitality, humility, and cautiousness of the guest, who does not attempt to control everything in the other’s home. Being a guest involves responsiveness to environment and people, including the host, other guests, and their culture, traditions, and rituals. A simple yet powerful example: Imagine arriving at the door of a friend who invited you to have dinner with her family and seeing many pairs of shoes left outside. How do you act?

Being a guest in the world involves acknowledging that our stay is temporary and that we do not necessarily own this house, this pale, blue dot in the universe. To revisit the quote earlier,

Neither am I the owner on this earth, nor a tenant,  
I am but a guest for a lifetime. (Oğur 2016)

In the following, I explore this sentence from multiple perspectives, including intercultural, religious, ecological, ventriloqual, respiratory, and aesthetic.

We already touched on the intercultural through the discussion above on the qualities of being a guest, some of which are worth repeating here: a willingness to attend to the guidelines of the homeowner; an unassuming attitude accompanied by an interest to learn; and hospitality, humility, and cautiousness of the guest, who does not attempt to control everything in the other’s home.

Arnett’s (2005) examination of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s life and scholarship exemplifies the attitude of being a guest in the world embedded in a religious communicative ethic, where the religious communicator with a guiding faith story never forgets whose home this is. “A religious communicator assuming the role of guest does not act as if he or she owns someone else’s house” (53). The standpoint of the religious communicator, as a guest in the Master’s home, begins with listening, humility, and caution regarding one’s limits of knowing. The interpretive stance of the guest, from a religious communication perspective, recognizes the generosity of the owner, in response to which a sense of gratefulness and responsibility emerges.

The ecological perspective of Thomas Berry (1999) offers another framework that supports the metaphor of being a guest in the world. Berry (1999,

2006) underlines that the viability of the human species is intimately connected with the viability of the earth, and he repeatedly reminds of the “dependence of the human on the integral functioning of the planet” (2006, 19), as the human subsystem is part of the earth system. Calling for a change from an anthropocentric to a biocentric sense of reality and value, Berry (1999, 2006) shares a vision of being part of the earth and in reciprocal relation with the non-human, rather than an attitude of ownership of the non-human world. An example Berry (1999) offers is illustrative:

As one woman told a group assembled in Florida after Hurricane Andrew, she did not consider herself a victim but a participant in this wild event in all its creative and destructive aspects. The hurricane, she insisted, was telling us something. It was telling us how to build our houses if we wished to dwell in this region. It was telling us to consider well the winds and the sea, to mark well the fact that if we live here we must obey the deeper laws of the place, laws that cannot be overridden by any type of human zoning. We might live here if we wish but on terms dictated by powers other than human. The hurricane has its own discipline. It is itself a response to the needs of the region. This we need to know: how to participate creatively in the wildness of the world about us. For it is out of the wild depths of the universe and of our own being that the greater visions must come. (51)

Attending to the deeper laws of the place, recognizing the discipline of the hurricane where the hurricane itself is a response to a larger reality, and learning to participate in this larger reality to which we belong all illustrate the metaphor of being a guest in the world.

Listening to the hurricane to discern what it is telling is aligned with François Cooren’s ventriloquial approach to communication, which alerts us that we are not only actors but also “passers” in communicative situations (Cooren 2016; Cooren, Higham, and Brummans 2021; Cooren and Sandler 2014). Not only do we say and do things as actors, but we also make things (such as the hurricane) speak through us, which allows them to affect and shape us, including our view of the world and our place in it. We are also passers in the sense that feelings, desires, emotions, and obsessions pass through us, prompting us to say and do things (Cooren 2016). In the case of the woman who gave voice to the hurricane, not only was she acting on behalf of the hurricane by making it speak through her, but also her strong desires, emotions, and longing to participate in a larger reality—the discipline or dynamic of wilderness or the universe—were acting on her, prompting her to give voice to what matters by ventriloquizing the hurricane. Cooren’s ventriloquial framework of communication recognizes that we are guests in the world, part of multiple participants and co-contributors that make a difference in constructing a given situation.

Finally, let’s listen to the respiratory so as not to be “dangerous thinkers” (Škof and Berndtson 2018, x) who have not attended to the breath—the invisible and life-giving breath that is “a connecting force” and that “connects the human being with the outside world and the outside world with his inner world . . . an original unceasing movement and therefore actual life,” as Ilse Middendorf (1990),

a dedicated teacher of somatic breath practices, put it (12). The first respiratory revelation I wish to share with you today, something you can see for yourself right here and now, is related to the language most of us use in referring to the experience of breathing, which shapes our relation to the breath, the body, and the world: *"I am breathing."* Upon attending to breathing as a lived experience, however, one might quickly realize that the breath breathes us, and we are not necessarily the ones in charge. Don't take my word for it, please see for yourself. Let's bring attention to the breath for a moment, and without attempting to change it in any way, just be aware of the breath as it moves through you. Let it come and go, sensing the movements in the body. This is the challenge: to let go of controlling the breath as one becomes conscious of it. Who is breathing? (Pause).

Rest in the awareness of breathing, letting the breath come and go on its own pace. As David M. Kleinberg-Levin (2018) states, learn to breathe as *Gelassenheit* (releasement) rather than the will to power:

If we would learn *Gelassenheit*, learn a way of being that is not the will to power, we must first give thought to our breathing. Only when our breathing is free, released from this power, will it be giving to our speech a breath that is truly drawn from the whole of being, and that returns to that openness with every word. (10)

So, the first lesson we learn from attending to the breath, in terms of our participation in the opening of the world through the breath, is a lesson in releasement, letting go, and finding the right attunement to the world, ourselves, and others by being referenced to the breath—in other words, by learning to be a guest of this breath that breathes us. We are derivative of the breath, a guest for a lifetime until the last inhale and exhale.

Along these lines, Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson (2018) propose a new respiratory philosophy, inspired by the masters of breath, that is marked by a respiratory difference, which facilitates a new way of thinking and seeing the world:

To see the world in a respiratory way would mean to see it within the atmosphere of breathing, and perhaps to see it according to the breath or to see it in collaboration with breathing. The respiratory philosophy would then be to relearn to see the world perpetually within the atmosphere of breathing. This would mean that whatever we are looking at, we must always be conscious of the atmosphere of breathing and strive to see our subject within it. (xvi)

Škof and Berndtson connect breathing and sensing the world, where the breath guides the sensing, the seeing, as we give ourselves over to it. To see our subject within the breath, and to be guided by the breath to see and sense the world, is to be a guest of the breath, to let the breath guide us.

Finally, the aesthetic perspective on the theme of being a guest in the world highlights the affective, bodily aspect of our existence in the world, the condition of "being effectuated," as Bruno Latour (2004) puts it: "to have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning 'effectuated,' moved, put into motion by other entities,

humans or nonhumans. If you are not engaged in this learning you become insensitive, dumb, you drop dead" (205). We are affected by the world before we conceptually make sense of it. We are enveloped by the world and affected by it before we can act on it. The heart of being human, as Latour states, is learning to become sensitive to what the world is made of—and, Arnett would add, *responding* to the world through this learning.

At the heart of the metaphor of being a guest is a movement regarding agency from the primacy of an autonomous, self-made, self-willed individual that acts upon others to a self that emerges in response to the other. The "derivative self" (Arnett 2003) finds its identity in attending to the other. The focus of attention moves from oneself to the other in attending to culture, faith story, nature/earth/non-human world, and body/breath. Being a guest in someone's home or in the world is rooted in an understanding of derivative self that respectfully, humbly, and joyfully attends to what is given. This sharply contrasts with an attitude of entitlement that self-righteously takes what is given for granted.

A repeating theme in Arnett's work is "communicative responsiveness" (e.g., 2012, 15) through which "human identity finds shape and character" (16). The derivative self is situated in the world; it is shaped in meeting existence beyond its liking or approval and through its response to the demands of existence (the hurricane example above is illustrative). Arnett (2013) understands existence as a "primordial shaper of the self" (15) that calls for our attention and responsiveness. The discussion of responsive, derivative self is essential in making sense of Arnett's examination of tenacious hope.

Arnett's (2022) discussion of tenacious hope is grounded in the meeting of everyday life on its own terms, which contrasts with the unreflective assumption and anticipation of optimism that existence will conform to one's expectations. For Arnett, such expectation and demand reflect a consumer mentality, "placing responsibility on existence, not on one's own actions" (6). Arnett's framing of the vitality and absurdity of tenacious hope radically distinguishes it from optimism that is tied to progress and growth. Communication ethics of tenacious hope resides in "an absurd sense that one's labor matters even when the fruits of one's actions remain unknown" (11). One's labor matters not because of the success of an expected outcome but because, as Hannah Arendt highlights, it is a necessity; doing one's part shapes one's life due to an existential connection between one's labor and life. "The reward of toil and trouble lies in nature's fertility, in the quiet confidence that he who in 'toil and trouble' has done his part, remains a part of nature in the future of his children and his children's children" writes Arendt ([1958] 1989, 107). Laboring is participating in the fertility of life, fulfilling one's responsibilities, and finding gratification in engaging the necessities of existence. Laboring shapes the derivative self.

The uncertainty of the outcome of one's labor is key to Arnett's (2022) discussion of tenacious hope. Tenacious hope does not dwell in undue confidence in the certainty of a single direction but "within shadows and darkness, ever suspicious of an unreflective commitment to progress" (194). The attitude of being a guest in the world resonates with tenacious hope in terms of the cautious,

observant, humble predisposition with which one listens, inquires, and attends. Tenacious hope finds life in attending to the local and staying open to the “not yet” rather than attaching to a desired outcome based on preconceived expectations. Within shadows and darkness, “somehow and someday, one answers an existential demand that wades through a crowded and often joyless void, propelled by the absurdity of tenacious hope” (11–12). Somehow and someday . . .

In an essay titled “Thinking Elsewhere,” or “To Think from Elsewhere” in a translation I prefer, Jean-Luc Marion (2019) writes,

The current of the world crashes relentlessly upon me, nearly swallowing me up in the torrent of what appears . . . among all its appearances, which truly concern me? Alternatively: to what degree do they sufficiently give themselves to me to give me access to a reality? Or otherwise: which of these appearances are important to me and truly concern me because they form an actual world around me and in me? (5–6)

In the course of everyday life, the flux of appearances Marion writes about shows up and passes away without being noted as remarkable; it is mostly left unattended and forgotten. There are exceptions, however, when some phenomenon takes hold of you and does not let itself be forgotten. This type of phenomenon distinguishes itself by its impact, intensity, and transformative power whereby one will not stay the same after the experience.

Marion (2019) defines revelation “as a phenomenon that is not forgotten, a presence that does not pass away, because it affects and transforms those that see, perceive, and receive it” (7). A simple, everyday example offered by Marion to illustrate revelation (with a small “r”) is learning how to ski and make a turn. You are ready, facing the slope, and the instructions offered by your friend or instructor are simple indeed: shift your weight from one leg to the other as you start moving downhill. You understand and observe this being done by others. Yet when it is your turn, you find yourself tensing up your leg, holding on tightly, losing control, and falling. Over and over again. Several days go by, and you are exhausted, discouraged, and ready to quit. Then, you close your eyes and decide to try again. All of a sudden you find yourself skiing, turning, and not falling. Without knowing how or why, you find yourself skiing.

Marion (2019) defines this experience as a revelation that will not be forgotten due to three dimensions. First, it reveals itself rather than being decided or constituted by me. Second, in revealing itself, it reveals a world (such as the open space of the mountain that was inaccessible, the slopes I could not experience before). Third, it reveals me to myself, gives me access to a new aspect of myself (the skier), and it reveals me to others (such as the other skiers with whom I can socialize). For Marion, revelatory phenomena are unforgettable due to their transformative effect and especially because they cannot be willed or intentionally produced: “it maintains the initiative over its own manifestation” (11). I do not fully understand or foresee how or why it happens, yet it affects and transforms me. A revelatory phenomenon “originates from *elsewhere*” (12, emphasis original) and leaves a trace, an impression that will not be forgotten. What makes revelatory

experience unforgettable is its power over the subject in that it cannot be decided, intended, or produced; it comes from elsewhere, impresses itself, and maintains a sense of opaqueness whereby one cannot fully comprehend it. Marion offers other examples where these three dimensions of revelation can be encountered, including the experiences of falling in love, performing, teaching, or praying.

Let's connect the discussion above to the beginning of this talk, "the revelatory is the reminder that we are *guests in the world*." Despite our desires to be in charge, to be the host, and to know, we find ourselves exposed to that which originates from elsewhere, that which I cannot decide or even understand fully. Yet through this exposure, as John D. Caputo (2019) puts it, "we begin to lose our grip and find ourselves in the grip of something that carries us along" (15). Tenacious hope emerges from elsewhere; it reveals a world, and it reveals us to ourselves. It is a "virtue of impossible" along with faith and love (15).

Tenacious hope is an "unstoppable force . . . when a sense of why is no more" (Arnett 2022, 11). An invisible path opens, through attention and deep longing, beyond a sense of knowing why or how. Tenacious hope comes from elsewhere, at the limit of knowing, leaning on the impossible. Tenacious hope reminds us that we are guests in the world, standing right at the limit of the impossible.

## The Revelatory Is the *Heart of Dialogue*

"A poem . . . only exists while it's on the writing desk; by the time its ink has dried, it should be recognized as just a scrap of paper."  
—Matsuo Bashō (qtd. in Hirshfield n.d.)

The seventeenth-century Japanese haiku master Bashō's words above point to what Emmanuel Levinas (1998) claimed as "the hold the *said* has over the *saying*" (5). As an antecedent to linguistic systems, a "foreword preceding languages" (5), the Saying gets subordinated to a theme as it moves into a language and becomes objectified in representation. The poem turns into a "scrap of paper," as Bashō states.

Yet, we are called to respond—to respond before the ink dries, without a script, "in a saying that must also be unsaid" (Levinas 1998, 7). This is the "difficult freedom of communication ethics" that Arnett (2017, 16) writes about in *Levinas's Rhetorical Demand: The Unending Obligation of Communication Ethics*—a difficult freedom, without the clarity of an answer, that "rejects the impulse to reify answers and control one's identity . . . dependent on the wonder of darkness" (33). Like finding one's way on a path covered with leaves in the fall.

So, how does one respond? In "a saying that must also be unsaid" (Levinas 1998, 7). Sounds like a Zen koan. It is indeed. "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" or "What was your face before you were born?" Zen koans push the limits of language, thinking, and the known toward an opening, an awakening, a letting go, an interruption of the self. For Levinas (1998), a "saying that must also be unsaid" emerges in being exposed to the other without holding back, in

the *activity* of saying that remains a “passivity more passive than all passivity” (15), a saying that does not protect itself in the said. Saying is an expression that reveals itself in the suffering of being exposed to the other, in sincerity, vulnerability, and surrender that do not belong to the order of being (or not being) but a being otherwise. Being otherwise, for-another, “is the very fact of finding oneself while losing oneself” (11).

The “difficult freedom of communication ethics” (Arnett 2017, 16) that does not and cannot rely on a script or prescription “emphasizes infinity in opposition to totality” yet also recognizes the necessity of totality that “preserves a trace of Saying” (37). One contemplates, reasons, reflects, engaging insights from education, institutions, traditions, the particularity of the historical moment, of the other, and attends to the revelatory. The *dialogue between the said and the saying* is crucial in the emergence of a genuine response. “The revelatory is the *heart of dialogue*.” Yet, questions emerge regarding the status of the revelatory in our current age of distraction and attention capture. “The fundamental question one must ask about progress is whether it enlarges us as human beings attentive to others” (Arnett 2013, 116). Attentiveness is one of the main themes in Arnett’s work and directly related to the revelatory. Informed by the said, one attends to the saying. But can we assume an ethics of attention as part of communication ethics, especially in our techno-digital age? I will briefly explore this question here.

### *Communication Ethics Assumes an Ethics of Attention*

In *The Ethics of Attention*, Silvia Caprioglio Panizza (2022) offers a rich discussion of attention as a social and ethical phenomenon. Panizza highlights that attention is not detached, abstract knowledge but “participating in what we are seeing or thinking about” (2). Attention joins us to the “the experience of a reality from which distraction, defenses, or projection separates us. That, in itself, makes us better, more open and less self-concerned. Every time, often imperceptibly, attention shapes us and our world” (2). Thus, attention has fundamental implications regarding our engagement with the world, how we experience reality, and who we become. When we attend, we acknowledge and recognize the existence of something other than the self.

Panizza (2022) highlights the truth-seeking aspect of attention, which involves a restraint of the ego in terms of its projections, attachments, and desire to know. Attending in this way “can mean patiently waiting for our faculties to become attuned to the object and for its multiple aspects to reveal themselves” (10). This patient attention, connected to the revelatory, is not effortful but an “active passivity” (28). It is deeply receptive, an allowing rather than a seeking. Thus, although attention can be willed in the sense that we can choose to pay attention, to direct and redirect our attention, the patient or meditative attention that Panizza writes about, based on Iris Murdoch’s (1970) discussion of agency and attention, involves a letting: “to let ourselves be struck by an object, or led by it, and influenced not only in our perception but also in our ‘energy.’ . . . If you try too hard, strive to find, you will lose the object” (28). The revelatory emerges through the invitation of this spacious, delicate, effortless waiting that seems to be

the kind of attentiveness needed in the activity of “saying that must also be unsaid” (Levinas 1998, 7).

## **The Revelatory Emerges in What Is Termed “*Unintended Consequences*”**

“We don’t know what to pay attention to anymore,” a PhD student said in our Crisis Communication course last fall. In *Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han (2015) writes about the “excess of stimuli, information, and impulses” (12) that radically affect the structure of attention and cognition: fragmented perception and scattered attention (hyperattention) displace deep, contemplative forms of attention. This flat mode of attention is incapable of attuning to wonder, beauty, rest, boredom, and creativity, which lie at the heart of the cultural achievements of humanity and a concern for good life that goes beyond an impulse for survival.

James Williams (2018) underlines that threats to our attention cannot be categorized under mere distraction or annoyance anymore; they undermine our capacities for self-regulation and the integrity of human will at individual and collective levels. Warning that something deep and potentially irreversible is happening to human attention in the age of information, Williams boldly and rightfully states, “The liberation of human attention may be the defining moral and political struggle of our time” (xii). The liberation of human attention also has crucial implications for the field of communication studies and communication ethics in terms of scholarship, teaching, and application.

The discussion on the loss of freedom of attention, attunement, wonder, rest, and creativity finally brings me to the context of hollow modernity, which is characterized by disembodied presence, excess of stimuli, loss of freedom of attention, and loss of empathy that feed thoughtlessness. As the boundaries between physical and virtual reality get increasingly blurred, people live in a sense of disorientation, discontentment, isolation, and a deep longing for genuine connection, yet without fully remembering how to cultivate it anymore. They look but do not see, as their attention is elsewhere. They are present yet absent, floating in space—existentially uprooted without a connection to their bodily presence, emotions, and what happens around them. Sounds dark, doesn’t it? Don’t we live this every day, in the classroom, on the street?

However, remember: “it is *not possible to totally ignore the revelatory*. It *emerges in what is termed, ‘unintended consequences’*” (Arnett, personal communication, emphasis added). So, let’s come back to the breath and our final respiratory revelation for today. What does it mean to participate in the opening of the world through the breath?

## **Learning to Breathe as Learning to Be-with**

Hazrat Inayat Khan (2020) writes, “People ordinarily think of breath as that little air they feel coming and going through the nostrils, but they do not think of it as that vast current which goes through everything” (89). We breathe with others; we

share a life-giving current that flows through all of us. Awakening to the breath is realizing at a deep embodied level that being-with (*mitsein*) is first and foremost a *breathing*-with. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated this fact powerfully. We could not share breath together during the pandemic; we had to be physically separated. And in the boxed windows of Zoom, though we could see each other as images, we could not breathe-with each other in the same space, which has consequences for being-with in terms of sensing the presence of the other at an embodied level.

In his introduction to the practice of mindfulness of breathing, meditation teacher Gil Fronsdal offers the metaphor of the bridge in reference to the breath (Insight Meditation Center 2021). He highlights the intimate connection of our lives to the breath and how breathing is a bridge for us to feel a deeper connection to the world and to ourselves. Fronsdal shares a story of awakening to the experience of breathing with all living beings after attending a botany class in college. Focusing deeply on the big, circular diagrams the professor drew on the board, which illustrated the cycle of oxygen and carbon dioxide, Fronsdal walked out of the classroom and found himself standing in the courtyard of the campus with some very big, old oak trees. In that moment, he realized that his life depended on those trees, which create oxygen. With a keen sense of interconnection, support, and mutuality of breathing-with these big oak trees, Gil perceived them to be as important as parts of his own body. He perceived a sense of continuity between his body and the trees, and the rigid boundaries were softened: “there was a continuity and there was no sharp line between me here and the trees there. Somehow, we were in it together.”

And, we are—in this breathing-with—together. Yet we forget, just as we forget that speaking is an emergence from breathing, a constant renewal with each inhale and exhale. Being referenced to the breath is to resist reification, essential to the active passivity of “saying that must also be unsaid” (Levinas 1998, 7)

A couple ideas stand out from this presentation that I would like to leave you with:

Tenacious hope is a revelatory phenomenon.

Somehow, in some way, one responds to an existential demand.

In breathing, being breathed, and breathing-with, saying emerges beyond reification. Taking this one step further, how might we think of a model of communication as a revelatory experience—a model of communication that has the revelatory at the center rather than an exchange of messages, effectiveness, and even meaning making? Communicators as “guests” attentive to breathing-with, present at the limits of knowing, open to the emergent to reveal itself? How would such an understanding reveal the world and reveal us to ourselves?

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## Arnett's Existentialist Call: Attending to the Ground, Soil, and Mud of Everyday Life

Matthew P. Mancino

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**Abstract:** Existentialism, a school of philosophy heavily influencing the field of communication in the second half of the twentieth century, represents a movement from abstract philosophizing to concrete human life. Ronald C. Arnett's call for attentiveness to the ground, soil, and mud of everyday life echoes this philosophical school's commitment to the concrete with a recognition and response to the particularity of an Other. This paper brings Walter Kaufmann's ([1956] 1975) *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* and Maurice Friedman's ([1964] 1999) *Worlds of Existentialism* into conversation and places them within the growth of the field of communication to offer a nuanced understanding of how existentialism informs Arnett's work on dialogic ethics and philosophy of communication.

**Keywords:** Arnett, Ronald C.; existentialism; dialogue; philosophy of communication

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### Introduction

Ronald C. Arnett offered the metaphors of the ground, soil, and mud of everyday life to guide interpersonal communication by attending to the particularity of embodiment and lived experience. These concepts recognize standpoint as a communicative horizon that contextualizes interpersonal exchange by bearing weight upon human understanding. Efforts to disregard the particularity of the ground, soil, and mud of everyday life can lead to routine cynicism and perpetuated dissatisfaction with human relationships (Arnett and Arneson 1999). Attentiveness to these terms illuminates the real constraints of a person and situation while simultaneously inviting novel possibilities for understanding and relationship building. The ground, soil, and mud of everyday life carry existentialist undertones by focusing on concrete rather than generalized or abstracted notions of embodiment or experience. Ultimately, this essay contends that Arnett's call to attend to the ground, soil, and the mud of everyday life

recognizes and responds to the particularity of an Other in a way that represents existentialism's influence on communication.

This paper proceeds in four sections. First, the essay overviews the anthologies of Walter Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) and Maurice Friedman ([1964] 1999), which together review existentialism's seminal thinkers and characteristic themes. Second, the paper places this strand of philosophical thought within the history of the speech communication discipline. Third, the essay offers Arnett's metaphors of ground, soil, and mud as representative of communication's embrace of existentialism, attending specifically to how Arnett used these metaphors to articulate their value for dialogic engagement. Finally, the paper ends with a brief concluding summary. Arnett, informed by the phenomenological dialogue of Martin Buber, offers existentialist coordinates that shape his approach to communication ethics and dialogue.

## Existentialism Situated in Philosophical Thought

The existentialist anthologies of Walter Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) and Maurice Friedman ([1964] 1999) actively shaped American understanding and access to foundational existentialist texts. First, Kaufmann's *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (EDS), published in 1956 and later reissued as an expanded version in 1975, not only identifies and highlights the nuances of individual existentialist thinkers but also includes Kaufmann's original translations of Nietzsche, Rilke, and Heidegger. Stanley Corngold's (2019) biography on Kaufmann comments on its widespread presence on US college campuses throughout the 1960s (45). Second, Friedman's *Worlds of Existentialism* (WOE), published in 1964 and later reissued in 1991 and 1999, identifies the central themes that drive existentialist thought and its future directions. WOE, named an "anthological masterpiece" by Emil Fackenheim (qtd. in Friedman [1964] 1999, xiii), expanded the confines of existentialism's presence throughout Western philosophy.

When read together, Kaufmann and Friedman offer a comprehensive collection of existentialist readings that construct nuanced perspectives of existentialism's various strands. This section provides brief biographical sketches of Kaufmann and Friedman before identifying significant insights from their respective anthologies. Their works reveal the prominence of a subject situated existentially and intersubjectively. The emphasis on a subject's situatedness and their relationality to the world around them provides meaningful insight into why existentialism has had a particular influence on communication and dialogue studies.

### *Walter Kaufmann: Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*

Kaufmann (1921–80) was born into a Jewish family in Freiburg, Germany and died in Princeton, New Jersey at age 59. His father Bruno was a lawyer and Protestant convert; his mother Edith (née Seligsohn) kept her Jewish faith. In 1933, the same year that Adolf Hitler rose to power, Kaufmann celebrated his bar mitzvah in Berlin at age 12. Although the Nazi regime did not permit him to attend university,

he entered the Institute for Jewish Studies in March 1938; his aspiration was to become a rabbi. Kaufmann's family emigrated to the United States in January 1939—just nine months before the start of World War II. That fall, he enrolled in Williams College in Massachusetts as a sophomore and graduated in two years with honors. Kaufmann's mentors were John William Miller and James Bisset Pratt, who specialized in the philosophy of history and comparative religion respectively. As an undergraduate, he left the Jewish faith and garnered "a deeply critical attitude toward all established religions" (Corngold 2019, 4). After graduating, Kaufmann studied at Harvard for a year prior to joining the US Army Air Force and serving as an interrogator in the Military Intelligence Service during World War II. At this time, Kaufmann encountered the works of Nietzsche and returned to Harvard to complete his PhD thesis, "Nietzsche's Theory of Values," in 1947. His dissertation would inform his first book, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, in 1950. In the fall of 1947, Kaufmann began teaching at Princeton University, where he later obtained full professorship in 1962 and remained until his untimely passing 33 years later (Corngold 2019).

At the time of *EDS*'s publication, Kaufmann had been teaching at Princeton for nine years and had already secured a reputation for his philosophical acumen, paving the way for his telling of existentialism as a significant strand of continental philosophy. In *EDS*, Kaufmann situates existentialism as a "perfidious individualism" obsessed with "failure, dread, and death" and imbued with "extreme states of mind" that reject belief systems abstracted from human life (11–12, 21). My reading of *EDS* relies upon three main themes characteristic of Kaufmann's telling of existentialism: (1) the primacy of Nietzsche; (2) an emphasis on literature; and (3) an invitation to the textual interplay between various strands and applications of existential thought.

First, Kaufmann emphasizes Nietzsche's distinctive influence on existentialist thinkers. Kaufmann's prolific and productive scholarly life was marked by his central contributions to Nietzschean philosophy. Kaufmann's work on Nietzsche, alongside his "superb translations," distanced public understandings of the philosopher from prevailing associations tied to "brutality, madness, and the Nazis" (Princeton n.d., para. 3). Kaufmann positioned Nietzsche at a point of transition in Western philosophy that reasserted the fundamentality of the thinking subject. Nietzsche urged individuals to base their decisions on the passions alongside reason and to reject adherence to pre-given doctrines that constrain choice-making. Nietzsche dared individuals to think and live for themselves with a full embrace of the concrete reality that the world presents. Kaufmann identifies Nietzschean influence in Ortega y Gasset, Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre, and Nietzschean undertones in Rilke, Kafka, and Camus. Even though Kaufmann begins his anthology with Dostoevsky and titles his chapter on Kierkegaard "The First Existentialist," Nietzsche is a primary and reemerging focus in Kaufmann's story of existentialism.

Second, Kaufmann centers the role of literature in developing existentialist thought. His choice to begin *EDS* with Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* reflects this positioning; for Kaufmann, this work offers the "best overture for existentialism ever written" through its introduction of anxiety, decision-making,

and a denial of self-deception (12–14). He continues to highlight literary perspectives throughout the anthology. Corngold (2019) suggests that Kaufmann favors existentialist literature over philosophical perspectives. Consistent with existentialism's revolt against abstract philosophical systems, the concrete aspect of literature focuses on responses to lived situations.

Third, Kaufmann's writing invites intertextual reflections that place existentialist thinkers in conversation with one another. Corngold (2019) suggests that Kaufmann's approach enacts the Nietzschean *exphesis* in its suspension of judgment and presentation of multiple sides of an argument before reaching a final interpretation. This technique allows readers to decide how to understand the contributions from various thinkers and their extension to applied contexts, inviting dialectic and dialogic engagement. As this section moves into a summary of Kaufmann's commentary, I attend to the primacy of Nietzschean philosophy, the value and influence of literature, and an invitation to intertextual reflection.

As previously noted, Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) begins *EDS* with Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, arguing that this work introduces what would become recurrent motifs within existentialism—namely, anxiety, decision-making, and a disdain for self-deception. According to Kaufmann, *Notes from Underground* rejects self-deception and centers on one's inner life, addressing moods, anxieties, and decisions. Kaufmann highlights the affinity that Nietzsche found in Dostoevsky after encountering a French translation of the text by an accidental reach of the arm. Nietzsche was profoundly impressed and understood *Notes from Underground* to be an anecdote for the impossibility of knowing oneself (Boulogne 2019). Similarly, Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) celebrates this work as a “new voice” in literature that introduces a theme of self-preoccupation, which positions individuality as simultaneously disgusting and supremely good (12). The underground man points to a number of contradictions—being pejoratively a “sick” and “spiteful” man who is honorifically the cleverest person in the room (53, 58). This intertextual polyphony of voices composing and texturing the psyche of the underground man problematize decision-making, a key theme explored by Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard, a contemporary to Dostoevsky though his writings preceded *Notes from Underground*, is the second voice in *EDS*. Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) justifies this order, contending that Kierkegaard can be read as an individual who could have “stepped right out of Dostoevsky's pen” (15). Kaufmann situates Kierkegaard's project as a reclaiming of the individual in revolt against the hegemony of Greek philosophy in theology, ethics, and metaphysics. Greek philosophy attempts to find truth in objectivity by removing the individual, whereas Kierkegaard positions truth in subjectivity by centering the individual (17, 121). From Kierkegaard's perspective, an individual's situatedness grounds their decision-making as a moment of ethical choice. Kaufmann provides an invitation to intertextual reflection in Kierkegaard that questions his interplay between the passions and reason. In response to this questioning, Corngold (2019) recounts that Henry Hatfield, Walter Cerf, and Calvin Schrag critique Kaufmann's depiction of Kierkegaard as too selective and reductive, especially in its deemphasis on religious grounding and appeals to reason. Despite Kaufmann's

selective engagement with Kierkegaard, he contended with themes of individuality, passion, self-consciousness, failure, dread, death, and decision-making that guided the development of existentialism, establishing Kierkegaard's centrality to the field.

Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) then announces the centrality of Nietzsche in the development of existentialism. In fact, Kaufmann suggests that Nietzsche is as essential to existentialism as Aristotle is to Thomism; he continues that Nietzsche, however, cannot be called an existentialist for the same reason that Aristotle cannot be called a Thomist (22). Within Nietzsche's work, Kaufmann identifies central themes of suffering, cruelty, and resentment. However, against this backdrop, Kaufmann underscores Nietzsche's call for *amor fati*, or a love of fate, consistent with pre-Socratic, Dionysian literature that embraces life with joy (21). Consistent with existentialism's rejection of existing philosophies and belief systems, Nietzsche urges individuals to think for themselves, establish their own values, and make their own decisions. Kaufmann notes Nietzsche's influence on major thinkers in the twentieth century, nearly each of whom "saw something different in him" (22). For instance, Kaufmann explores the divergent interpretations offered by Jaspers and Heidegger in the next two chapters of *EDS*.

Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) begins addressing these distinctions in his commentary on Jaspers. Nietzsche informs Jaspers's central metaphor of dynamic "philosophizing," as contrasted with static "philosophy," with the former calling for decision-making through "the immersion in historical presentness" and cultivation of one's "inner constitution" (25). Jaspers develops this perspective of philosophizing into a new approach, which he terms *Existenzphilosophie*. Although Kaufmann disagrees with Jaspers, he recognizes his contribution as the first true strand of existentialism (22).

Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) then orients the reader to Heidegger by juxtaposing him to Jaspers—situating the two thinkers within a "rival[ry]" (34). The Heideggerian interpretation of Nietzsche facilitated a move outside of metaphysics. Heidegger critiqued Western philosophy as a history of Latin mistranslations from the original Greek, and his project attempted to use language to speak the "unsayable" (38). Heidegger's project diverged from "representational thinking" and reclaimed forgotten elements from Being as a safeguard against thoughtless responses (39). Despite these differences, Heidegger and Jaspers agreed on a rejection of the title "existentialist."

Unlike Jaspers and Heidegger, Sartre embraced the label "existentialist." Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) states that Sartre's existentialism stresses the fundamental role of lived experience, rather than self-deception, as an expression of sincerity. Sartre carries forward the rejection of self-deception introduced in Dostoevsky and echoed by Nietzsche. This perspective informs his notion of "bad faith," which involves the relation between *en-soi* (the in-itself qualities of a person, such as height) and *pour-soi* (the for-itself qualities of a self-aware person, such as bravery). One engages bad faith through the assumption that *en-soi* is *pour-soi* and consequently experiences an "escape from freedom" that limits choices to a preexisting mode of existence (44).

Throughout *EDS*, Kaufmann expresses a preference for existentialist literature. Sartre is a distinctive voice within this tradition that offered both literary and philosophic contributions. Corngold (2019) observes Kaufmann's appreciation for Sartrean literature. For instance, Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) describes Sartre's short story "The Wall" as comparable in novelty to Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. However, Kaufmann found Sartre's 1946 philosophical lecture titled "Existentialism Is a Humanism" troubling because it popularized "existence precedes essence" as a famous, yet reductive and inaccurate, definition of existentialism. Kaufmann explains that this lecture responded to the driving critiques of Sartre's philosophy and would have likely varied ten years later as the reception to his work evolved (45). Kaufmann nonetheless praised Sartre's literature as a conduit for engaging existential themes.

Literary expression permeates the story of existentialism in *EDS* with additional literary selections from Rilke, Kafka, and Camus in the original anthology and the addition of Ortega y Gasset appearing in the expanded 1975 edition. In each of these literary figures, Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) identifies the primacy of Nietzsche and invites an intertextual interplay across existentialist writings that questions whether art (i.e., literature) offers a better vessel for existentialist themes than philosophy. For instance, Kaufmann notes that Rilke's verse gained the attention of Sartre and Heidegger (134), that Kafka anticipates Heideggerian thrownness, Sartrean godlessness, and Camusian absurdity (143), and that Camus represents the redemption of a tragic world through Nietzsche's *amor fati* in "The Myth of Sisyphus" (49). Although Camus did not self-identify as an existentialist, Kaufmann considers him an "excellent finale" to the story of existentialism (375). For Kaufmann, existentialism cannot be told without attentiveness to literature.

### *Maurice Friedman: Worlds of Existentialism*

Eight years after Kaufmann first published *EDS*, Friedman completed *Worlds of Existentialism* (*WOE*). Friedman (1921–2012) was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. His father sold life insurance; his mother was a social activist, "voracious reader," and the daughter of a rabbi (Vitello 2012, para. 18). In 1942, Friedman earned a degree in literature from Harvard. After his graduation, he was a conscientious objector to World War II and worked as a smoke jumper—a parachuter who combats wildfires. Friedman earned a PhD in religion and history from the University of Chicago. His dissertation on Martin Buber would become the impetus for his first book *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* in 1956. Friedman held teaching affiliations at Sarah Lawrence College, Manhattanville College, Temple University, and San Diego State University.

In *WOE*, Friedman ([1964] 1999) aims to offer a "mature view of existentialism" that engages seminal writers through the similarities and differences of their perspectives on key themes in existentialist thought (3). In this volume, Friedman situates existentialism as "a movement from the abstract and general to the particular and concrete" (4). My reading of *WOE* situates the text as a response to Kaufmann's *EDS* by highlighting the following three insights: (1) the

contributions of Buber, (2) the importance of religious influences, and (3) a thematic organization offering what could be understood as what Arnett (1986, 2016) terms as Buberian “common center[s]” for conversations about existentialist ideas.

First, Friedman highlights Buber’s contributions to existentialism. Friedman is most celebrated for bringing Buber into mainstream discourse in the United States; Buber’s thought has inspired prominent figures including Martin Luther King Jr., Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama (Vitello 2012). Friedman articulates a split in existentialist perspectives between Buber, who grounds existence in the between, and figures such as Heidegger and Sartre, who ground existence in the individual. Kaufmann’s decision to exclude Buber from *EDS* was a point of concern for Friedman. Kaufmann offered a leading translation of *I and Thou*, was a personal acquaintance of Buber, and was deeply familiar with his work; Buber’s absence from *EDS* cannot be read as an oversight. In fact, Kaufmann positioned Buber on the margins of existentialism. In an essay titled “Buber’s Religious Significance,” Kaufmann concludes that Buber is not an existentialist and yet simultaneously the only existentialist (Friedman [1964] 1999, 12). Kaufmann (1964) recognizes that Buber’s project is consistent with the goals of existentialism while concurrently emphasizing the profound distinctiveness of Buber’s philosophy from that of mainstream existentialist thinkers, largely a reflection of its religious currents. Contrarily, Friedman positions Buber as a driving voice within the main thematic conversations of existentialism.

Second, while Friedman offers various points of nuanced contention with the framing and focus of *EDS*, a primary critique is Kaufmann’s downplaying of religion in his overview of existentialism. Kaufmann ([1956] 1975) proactively offers an explanation for religion’s deemphasis: (1) while religion has always been *existentialist*, the philosophical tradition of *existentialism* has origins in its revolt against preexisting belief systems, which ironically encompass religion; (2) no religious thinker has surpassed the contributions of Kierkegaard, who he terms “The First Existentialist”; and (3) religion is not needed to tell the story of existentialism (49–50). Friedman ([1964] 1999) counters all three of Kaufmann’s rationales. First, he suggests that the existentialist tenor of religion merits more, not less, attention to religious thought. Second, he questions the primacy of Kierkegaard as the sole representation of religious existentialism, offering several ancient Judeo-Christian texts alongside more contemporary religious voices. Third, Friedman views Kaufmann’s downplay of religion as a “reduc[tive]” telling that oversimplifies the entangled threads of existentialism (11). These contentions guide Friedman’s decision to focus the fifth section of his anthology on atheist, humanist, and religious existentialism.

Third, Friedman demonstrates a Buberian approach in his anthology’s organization that offers thematic “common center[s]” (Arnett 1986, 2016) for the construction of existentialist worlds, as emphasized in the title of *WOE*. Arnett derives common centers from the work of Buber, emphasizing its power to bring people into relationship around a shared purpose, often across contrasting perspectives. Friedman’s themes act as common centers by identifying mutual interests among existentialist thinkers with distinct and often divergent

standpoints. Friedman ([1964] 1999) intended for his thematic organization to facilitate the flexibility of reading through the works of an individual author and observing their varied positions on key existentialist themes (xxi). This format utilizes an alternative to Kaufmann's chronological and individual-driven approach. While each of these organizational structures facilitate given modes of reading, Friedman's advances the ability to understand how a particular writer contributes to a central conversation within the broader scope of existentialism. This feature acknowledges a thinker's concrete contribution in the various worlds of existentialism and discourages a reader's assumption that all of a writer's work represents one mode of thinking.

From this point, I associate Friedman with intersubjective engagement and Kaufmann with intertextual connections. Friedman's intersubjective structure showcases thinkers co-constructing the recurring themes of existentialism, while Kaufmann's intertextual connections illuminate how one text informs the framing of another. Notably, Friedman resists identifying any individual or text as the origin point of existentialism in *WOE*. While Kaufmann identifies Dostoevsky, and particularly *Notes from Underground*, as the "overture" to existentialism, Kierkegaard as "The First Existentialist," and Nietzsche as an origin for the revolt against preexisting belief systems, Friedman deemphasizes the centrality of any particular individual or text. Instead, he notes emergent themes within the worlds of existentialism.

The first thematic world of existentialism explored by Friedman ([1964] 1999) is what he terms the "Forerunners." For Friedman, the forerunners cannot be categorized as existentialists but are rather the primary influences on those he later identifies as existentialists. Ranging from Greek antiquity (Heraclitus) and Judeo-Christian religious texts to medieval mysticism and "nineteenth-century giants" (Dostoevsky and Nietzsche), these thinkers ask existentialist questions but may not deliver existentialist answers (Friedman [1964] 1999, 21). For example, Friedman contends that Dostoevsky answers existentialist questions with orthodoxy and devotional mysticism. In so doing, Friedman emphasizes the religious themes inherent to Dostoevsky's literature and solidifies the relevance of religion as an existentialist forerunner; his inclusion of Judeo-Christian religious texts extends this emphasis.

The second theme addressed by Friedman ([1964] 1999) is phenomenology and ontology. Existentialism's relationship to phenomenology and ontology reveals interconnecting and interdependent interests. Friedman grounds phenomenology in Wilhelm Dilthey and Edmund Husserl. For Friedman, Dilthey "raised phenomenology to a separate mode of knowing" with his emphasis on the centrality of the human subject "that is willing to value the unique that reveals itself," while Husserl situated phenomenology as "a systematic philosophy" through the "phenomenological reduction" that places the subject, or "transcendental ego," in relation to phenomena in the world (69–70). However, rather than existentialists, Friedman labels Dilthey a humanist (69), perhaps from his emphasis on reclaiming the centrality of human participation in the discovery of scientific knowledge, and Husserl an "idealist" (70), perhaps for the belief in the ability to bracket proper phenomena. Nevertheless, Dilthey informs the

existentialist approaches of Jaspers and Buber just as Husserl's transcendental ego influences Sartre and Heidegger (69–70). Notably, Friedman differentiates the phenomenology of Husserl and Buber; where Husserl stressed a method of reduction to identify the transcendental ego, Buber advanced that "real living" was found outside the self in "the 'between'—in 'meeting'" the other (71). Despite these contrasting approaches, phenomenology offered existentialism a philosophic approach to isolate the existential subject.

The third common center of *WOE* is the existential subject. Friedman ([1964] 1999) considers the existential subject to be "the heartland of existentialism" and a site of "maximum agreement among existentialists" (111). This space of agreement values individuality and authenticity. Friedman credits Kierkegaard with introducing the existential subject. Kierkegaard's writing is a byproduct of the Industrial Revolution's technocratic assumptions that simultaneously empowered and objectified the individual. During this era, technological innovation privileged the individual with an emphasis on progress while also objectifying the individual as a tool to advance production and monetary gain. According to Friedman, existentialists attempt to place humanity against the modern hegemony that privileges objectification, depersonalization, alienation, and division. Additionally, Friedman situates Ortega y Gasset's centrality of choice, Heidegger's differentiation of an authentic self from the "They" via anticipation of one's death, and Sartre's distinction of *pour-soi* and *en-soi* as notions that advance the existential subject. Friedman also recounts Jaspers's emphasis on *Existenz*, Nicholas Berdyaev's stress on "personality," Jacques Maritain's differentiation of the "person" from the "individual," Buber's I-Thou encounter, and his own interpretation of Kafka. For Friedman, these diverse perspectives on the existential subject preview the differences that become apparent in intersubjectivity and religion (111).

The fourth thematic world for Friedman ([1964] 1999) is intersubjectivity. Friedman begins this section with Kierkegaard, who placed intersubjectivity between an existential subject and God rather than reliant upon human relationships. Friedman juxtaposes Kierkegaard's position against those who stress human relationality as a necessary acknowledgment for existence (173). Friedman identifies two primary positions on human intersubjectivity—one that favors intersubjectivity as "a dimension of the self" (heralded by Heidegger, Sartre, and Paul Tillich) and another that stresses the primacy of intersubjectivity in relation to the other (articulated by Buber, Gabriel Marcel, Jaspers, and Camus) (173). Broadly, these theoretical differences construe an engagement with the world that grounds meaning in either the self or the other. In the preface to the reprinted 1991/1999 versions, Friedman explains that if he could reissue the anthology he would avoid such a sharp contrast between these positions. Instead, he would have engaged "subtle shadings" that more clearly attend to gradations of thought (xv) as modeled in his depiction of atheist, humanist, and religious existentialism.

The fifth area that Friedman ([1964] 1999) addresses is atheist, humanist, and religious existentialism. Central to this conversation is Friedman's critique of Sartre's definition of existentialism: "existence precedes essence" (239). Like

Kaufmann, Friedman finds this definition reductive. Friedman, however, expresses a distinctive concern related to the definition's association with atheism in ways that devalue religious perspectives. For Friedman, existentialism must account for what to do when faced with a lack of direction, regardless of one's positioning in relation to the gradations of atheist, humanist, and religious perspectives. Thus, the death of God proclaimed by Nietzsche and Sartre both is and is not a defining characteristic of existentialism (242). This conundrum should not be erroneously associated with atheistic positions alone and resonates with Buber's "eclipse of God" (242). This occlusion of God prompts a lack of direction introducing an uncertainty to which religious existentialists must also respond.

The sixth and final theme that Friedman ([1964] 1999) explores is psychotherapy. While psychotherapy should not be made synonymous to existentialism, the applications of existentialism to psychotherapy are noteworthy. Friedman observes this influence when accounting for differences in how existential themes have been applied by psychotherapists. For instance, Friedman explains various applications of Buber's I-Thou in patient-therapist relationships along a spectrum of full to limited mutuality, as well as the importance to distinguish the I-Thou from the I-It within interpersonal psychiatry. Similarly, while some identify self-actualization within the scope of existential psychotherapy, Friedman turns to Viktor Frankl, who suggests that responding to the "life-task" brings one to a "unique, meaningful existence" beyond the capabilities of self-actualization (367). Friedman then turns to Helen Merrell Lynd, who advances this notion by stating that "one's true self is not an already given reality but a life-long task" (367). While Friedman admittedly deemphasizes phenomenology in this theme, these applications move toward phenomenological considerations that place meaning either within the patient-therapist relationship or within the patient's world-design.

Friedman ([1964] 1999) concludes *WOE* with six future directions for the study of existentialism. These include (1) Heidegger's Nazism, (2) sex, (3) intersubjectivity, (4) literature, (5) phenomenological analysis versus the concrete, and (6) ontology and religion. While each is important, I focus on the fifth future direction due to its alignment with the ground, soil, and mud of everyday communicative life. This theme, which Friedman titles "Phenomenological Analysis of Existence Versus Pointing to the Concrete," cautions against gravitating toward an abstract philosophical system (like phenomenological analysis) that superimposes meaning onto particular lived situations; instead, this theme advocates for responding to the specific concerns of the other from the concrete perspective of an existential subject. This direction echoes Kaufmann ([1956] 1975), who places the future of philosophy in the tension between the precision of analytic philosophy and the messiness of existential approaches (51). Both Kaufmann and Friedman push scholars to consider the particularities of subjectivity and intersubjectivity with attentiveness to the often contradictory, absurd, and messy ground that shapes notions of self and other. Communication scholars have been uniquely positioned to respond to this question due to their discipline's interest in the situatedness of speakers' subjectivity and their intersubjectivity with audiences/relational others. The next section considers how

the field of communication has taken up this task before focusing on Arnett's notions of ground, soil, and mud as existential themes.

## **Existentialism in the Field of Communication**

The history of communication and rhetoric demonstrates moments of overlap with existentialism. The centrality of this connection directs Michael Hyde (1990) to contend that existentialism is a basis for rhetoric and Pat Gehrke (2009) to position existentialism as an origin point for philosophically driven accounts of communication. Indeed, Gehrke attests that Schrag recognized that rhetoric overtook philosophy as the leading field for ethical inquiry due to its "relevance to lived experience" (117). To fully understand the placement of existentialism within the field, this section surveys the landscape of the history of communication. The interplay of communication as a notion for philosophical inquiry and a discipline suggests that existentialism informs dialogue, philosophy of communication, and communication ethics.

In *The Ethics and Politics of Speech*, Gehrke (2009) offers a reflective account of the development of the communication discipline throughout the twentieth century. Gehrke divides this history into three eras: (1) the emergence of the discipline in the early twentieth century through the 1940s; (2) the centrality of philosophical and existential accounts of communication occurring from the 1950s through the mid-1970s; and (3) the key importance of ethics from the late 1970s through the end of the century. He engages in historical research about the discipline to uncover the "forgotten" influences that have directed communication studies (2). In fact, he aligns his task with Robert L. Scott's (1967) aim in "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," an article that Gehrke describes as "the best-known essay on the convergence of existentialism and rhetoric" (82). Although Scott does not explicitly name existentialism, he "philosophiz[es] about rhetoric" to understand "a way which has always been open and sometimes chosen, but seldom in a clear, incisive manner" (10). As Scott notes the limits of reason in the practice of rhetoric, he implicitly centers intersubjective engagement as a necessary dimension to rhetorical action. Throughout his historical telling of the discipline, Gehrke identifies existentialism as among the "forgotten" but often utilized tendencies of communication research.

Gehrke begins this tale in 1914, the founding year of the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, today known as the National Communication Association. At this time, the discipline had a fairly narrow focus on public address that encouraged open discussion rather than "compliance-gaining" techniques (Gehrke 2009, 12), which engaged persuasive appeals akin to manipulation or propaganda. This focus established strong connections between rhetoric and democracy and relied heavily upon humanities-grounded studies of written texts, ranging from public address to great works of literature (56). This approach positioned literature as a central path for discussions about how to foster strong character for good citizenship and the health of the democracy. Similar to Kaufmann and Friedman's framing of literature as a conduit

for existentialism, this pedagogical strategy recognized literary texts as an expression of the concreteness of existence that mirrored the limitations and possibilities of communicative action situated within a broader world of human relations. Herman Cohen (1994) also identifies the important influence of literature for early communication scholars, likely due to its ability to capture the particularities of embodied life; in fact, he contends that much of the interesting work in rhetoric in the early discipline was being produced by scholars within English as a sister discipline to speech communication.

Simultaneously, however, Gehrke recounts disciplinary commitments to social scientific principles that were always present in the field but intensified with an assumption that psychological analysis could advance audience adaptation. The presupposition was that these principles would develop clearer professionalism and that a “uniformity of method” (largely championed by Charles Woolbert) was necessary within the national association and its corresponding academic publication, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* (17). Situated within a historical moment that increasingly shared a preference toward science, objectivity, and technology, this tendency contextualizes the wide influence and adaptation of Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver’s (1949) mathematical model of communication transmission. Although Shannon and Weaver, who were both mathematicians, were interested in measuring the probability of successful transmission between nonhuman devices, their model was widely accepted and adapted by early scholars of human communication. This disciplinary preference fueled social science research as a vibrant and perhaps dominant avenue for the development of communication theory. It, likewise, directed instructors toward a focus on “mental hygiene” that advocated for extroversion, dominance, self-sufficiency, and emotional stability as characteristics of a strong and effective communicator (22). Interestingly, this commitment to scientific ideals produced an abstracted notion of human communication that dealt with generalized strategies without attending to the particularities of relational partners. In the tensions between analytic and existential approaches, this emphasis on science aligned more closely with the analytical tradition that overlooks the messiness of human life in ways that existentialist philosophies engage.

Gehrke’s (2009) most explicit and developed discussion of existentialist philosophy occurs in his explication of communication theory from the 1950s through the mid-1970s. Notably, this era corresponded with the popularization of writings from many of the best-known modern existentialists, including Sartre and Camus, as well as the first publications of Kaufmann’s and Friedman’s anthologies. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this moment also corresponded with an increasing interest in philosophical and existential approaches to communication (12). In a post-World War II era that observed a postmodern erasure of metanarrative agreement alongside an accelerated commitment to hypermodernism, communication became a point of application for responding to competing and seemingly irreconcilable decision-making standards. Communication theory, while continuing to embrace social science research, expanded its acceptance and appreciation of philosophically driven rhetorical approaches that grappled with multiple contradictory modes of engagement. The

influence of existentialist philosophies specifically challenged rhetoric's traditional leaning toward logical positivism (logos) with an expanded acknowledgement of the importance of emotion (pathos) and ethics (ethos) alongside various other forms of reason, such as narrative rationality. For Gehrke, this insight is informed by Scott (1967), whose epistemic view of rhetoric calls for an embrace of co-present and contradictory forms of reason and knowledge. Scott's contention embraces existentialist values that necessitate considerations about the particularities of a situation as a precursor to practicing good decision-making, discerning truth, and identifying individual responsibility. This insight highlights existentialism's influence not only on the philosophy of communication but also on communication ethics, particularly as one faces a call to personal responsibility without the presumption of certainty from generalized ethical codes for action.

This emphasis on the concreteness of existentialism rather than the generalizability of analytical philosophies was viewed as a threat to traditional conceptions of rhetoric rooted in Aristotelian thought. Gehrke (2009) explains that the threat was rooted in Sartre's famous adage "existence precedes essence," which suggested that "any individual's 'nature' and any society's structure were the results of, rather than the origin of, communication" (90). In fact, Gehrke contends that such a sentiment sent the speech communication discipline into a crisis, with many searching harder for an underlying and unifying human essence. He offers Kathryn Kohrs Campbell (on humans as "by nature subject to and capable of persuasion") and Kenneth Burke (on humans as "symbol-using animals") as two scholars who were both receptive to existentialism and still in search of some "essence of humanness" (89). Of course, as Kaufmann and Friedman both acknowledge, this reductive definition of existentialism fails to capture a textured understanding of the broader philosophical tradition. Nonetheless, Gehrke's comments reveal the reach of Sartre's influence.

In addition to a search for a unifying human essence, Gehrke offers a description of the intersections between existentialism and dialogue. He notes how scholars have conceptualized dialogue as an effort to legitimate the use of rhetoric for ethical inquiry. For example, Gehrke turns to John Poulakos, whose conception of dialogue was deeply informed by the existentialist work of Buber. Poulakos's triadic view of dialogue relied upon the self, the other, and the "between" as a communication event. Poulakos (1974) framed dialogue as "a mode of existence manifested in the intersubjective activity between two partners, who, in their quest for meaning in life, stand before each other prepared to meet the uniqueness of their situation and follow it wherever it may lead" (199). Within this view, predetermined expectations destroyed the dialogic possibilities of a communication event by shirking the meaningful particularities of any given encounter and discounting the value of the other. Alternatively, Poulakos advocated for participation in a communication event with an openness toward transformation void of predetermined content. This approach values the other over the self to the point that the self becomes the byproduct of the other. This other-oriented approach to dialogue places meaning in the between that

existentially constitutes human existence and imbues such encounters with ethical implications.

This work set the stage for communication research from the late 1970s until the end of the century, with existential themes continuing to inform the discipline. Gehrke (2009) credits Arnett with expanding understandings about existentialism's influence on communication ethics. Fundamental to this framing, Gehrke highlights Arnett's description of ethics as the "'practical heart of the disciplinary field'" consisting of a "willingness and courage to 'question another's decision'" (Arnett 1990, qtd. in Gehrke 2009, 115). Not only did Arnett's research in this area advance communication ethics as a vibrant and legitimate expression of these ideas, but his administrative and disciplinary leadership helped establish a place for communication ethics in the field. Arnett, with Janie M. Harden Fritz and Leeanne M. Bell McManus ([2009] 2018), defined communication ethics as the protection and promotion of goods and practices. They position communication ethics at the intersection of a philosophy of communication (informed by a good) and applied communication (informed by the practices that protect and promote a particular good). Although not presenting a prescriptive view of ethics, their work emphasizes communication practices that recognize difference, advance learning, and commit to dialogue.

Arnett's understanding of dialogic ethics was informed by Buber's existentialism. His work on Buber was affirmed by Friedman, who penned the introduction to *Communication and Community: Implications of Martin Buber's Dialogue*. In this monograph, Arnett (1986) relies upon Friedman's "community of otherness" and Buber's notion of the "interhuman" (16). The interhuman stresses the "between" where meaning emerges in the "interaction" of two interlocutors (16). Arnett's (2012, 2014, 2015) later work reclaims the value of monologue as an expression of communication ethics commitments tied to the ground on which one stands. Arnett contends that this monologic ground often serves as a starting point for dialogue. The monologic goods that guide one's life provide insight into the particularities of the self as an existential subject that contextualizes and guides intersubjective engagements.

Arnett's work on the interplay between dialogue and monologue is consistent with John Durham Peters's (1999) identification of dialogue and dissemination as two leading historical modes of communication. Peters identifies Socrates and Jesus as two of the earliest exemplars of dialogue and dissemination. For Peters, Socrates champions dialogue as a give-and-take where truth becomes attainable through dialectical exchange (the Socratic method). Importantly, this perspective privileges meaning as emergent from self-other relations rather than the persuasive interests of an individual. Jesus, however, represents Peters's champion of dissemination (34–35). Unlike Socrates, Jesus locates Truth within Himself; the communicative task then becomes sharing this message with others. In society generally and among communication scholars specifically, Peters observes an overwhelming historical preference for dialogue, while cautioning that it can become "tyrannical" (34). Dissemination, although often a devalued form of communication, can work toward justice in ways that uplift the voices of others (61–62).

As part of Peters's defense of dissemination, he describes this mode of communication as the "lot" of the human condition, dealing with the concreteness of human life rather than the ideals of dialogue (61–62). Of course, this recognition connects to an existentialist impulse recognizing the lived nature of human communication rather than idealized forms of exchange. Even Buber ([1958] 1970) in his classic work on dialogue, *I–Thou*, acknowledges the everyday necessity of I–It relations and insists that this mode of interaction maintains moments of ethicality. Buber insisted that one could not force another into dialogic engagement and that often a communicative partner may not want to be treated as a Thou. In fact, Buber (1966) warned against trying to force another into dialogue, describing it as "overrunning reality." The reciprocity and mutuality of I–Thou relations provides phenomenological and existential limits to dialogue as a form of communicative exchange. Like Arnett's contentions about the ties between monologue and dialogue and Buber's appreciation for both I–Thou and I–It interactions, Peters advocates for a rethinking of the idea of communication that respects dissemination while upholding dialogic commitments.

Peters (1999) identifies Kierkegaard as a thinker who models this space of dissemination and dialogic embrace, perhaps reflecting the dual influences that both Socrates and Jesus had on his philosophical thought. Kierkegaard, whom Peters views as "the first" to frame communication as a philosophical question (128), emphasized the inescapability of miscommunication due to "the impossibility of speech" and the limitations of language in expressing human existence (129). Peters recounts that Kierkegaard rejected the prevailing views of dialogue at the time of his writing as "telepathy" that discounted the real limitations of language and the difficulties of human relations (5). For Kierkegaard, these dialogic ideals presented a view of "easy communication" — of dialogue as "a clearance sale in the realm of spirit, a lowering of the price of understanding" (133). Kierkegaard considered the ideals of dialogue too abstract to respond to the concerns of a human life. This emphasis encourages a dialogic merging of minds with God as the Absolute source for meaning and authenticity to be disseminated with others.

Kierkegaard was writing during the Industrial Revolution, when a rapid advance in mechanical engineering brought new conceptions about human existence and relationality. These technological advances, particularly those dealing with (tele)communication developments, altered understandings about the nature, reach, and power of human speech, word, and action. While this technological environment inevitably contextualizes Kierkegaard's writing, it also shaped notions of communication and dialogue more broadly. Peters (1999) recounts that, consistent with the historical preference for dialogue as angelic telepathy, the telegraph exemplifies this context. The telegraph promised "shared understanding and instantaneous sympathy" without "word or speech" among disembodied existential subjects (108). Peters problematizes the telegraph's erasure of body as an elimination of plurality, eluding the recognition that we live among others with positions that "are both hidden from us and never exactly our own" (108). Thus, while introduced as an extension of dialogue, the telegraph more accurately aided information transfer and dissemination. Alternatively,

Peters suggests a preference for mediated communication technologies that reminded audiences of the embodied existential subject; he offers a fireside chat by FDR as an exemplar—particularly noting the president’s request for a glass of water as a reminder of human needs and limitations (220).

Subsequent communication technologies such as the telephone, camera, and phonograph echoed this disregard for the particular and similarly removed the embodied existential subject from intersubjective exchange (Peters 1999, 142). These trends have persisted with the individualizing effects of electronic and digital devices as well as machine learning. Throughout history, scholars have observed how communication technologies alter human existence and relationality. Even at the advent of writing as one of the earliest communication revolutions, Socrates expressed concerns in the Platonic dialogues that the written word would fundamentally change human functions, including memory, knowledge, and embodiment (Plato 2019; Postman 1992). As recent advancements in communication technologies continue to obscure the concrete individuals participating in communicative exchange, interlocutors are placed in a homogeneous standing that ignores, or at least overlooks, the nuances of positionality and situatedness at an existential level. The next section turns to Arnett’s acknowledgment of the importance of these themes with direct ties to existentialist impulses.

### **Arnett’s Metaphors of the Ground, Soil, and Mud of Everyday Life**

Although not falling strictly or narrowly within the bounds of existentialism, Arnett’s scholarship in philosophy of communication, dialogue studies, and communication ethics demonstrates a deep influence from existentialism. This influence surfaces most prominently in his reliance on Buber. Arnett’s work reveals existentialist influences explicitly through metaphors such as “existential mis/trust” (2016, 2020), “existential civility” (2011), and “existential homelessness” (1994). Each theme reflects a pivot toward and recognition of the ground upon which communication occurs, with an awareness that another’s situatedness likely does not match one’s own. For instance, existential mis/trust finds reassurance not within a person but rather in the narrative, institutional, and monologic ground from which one communicates. Similarly, existential homelessness occurs when one no longer finds a sense of identity or self within the positionality of one’s situatedness. In fact, in an interview on communication ethics with Pat Arneson, Arnett (2007) references as an exemplar of this metaphor the literature of Albert Camus, in which characters no longer feel at home but rather reflect a groundlessness characteristic of metanarrative collapse—perhaps best exemplified by Camus’s ([1942] 1989) use of “stranger” as a metaphor in his most famous novel. Nonetheless, Arnett’s use of existentialist metaphors emphasizes a communicator’s situatedness and positionality as a fundamental source for meaning and insight. Arnett often relies upon the language of *ground*, *soil*, and *mud* to express his existentialist attentiveness to positionality and situatedness. These

three metaphors (mud, soil, and ground) reflect existentialism's influence on Arnett and the field of communication more broadly.

Throughout his corpus, Arnett references the importance of ground as a recurrent theme. In Arnett's 2007 interview with Arneson, he explains the significance of ground, stating that one can "stand on ground and attend to the ground of another, allowing persons to be co-informed by ground that emerges 'between' persons" (59). I associate ground with a "stand[ing] on" that announces the monologic and dialogic dimensions of the existential subject with concrete relevancy to situatedness and positionality. Ground demonstrates the existential reality of particularity and the inevitability of difference between speakers, who enter and interpret a given exchange from divergent perspectives. This notion of ground exists prior to and outside of the self or the other; in Arnett's description, it is present "*a priori*" and creates a Gadamerian sense of bias that one carries into intersubjective exchange (64). Informed by Buber's notion of distance, Arnett emphasizes how these divergent perspectives provide dialogic possibilities for learning and understanding.

Arnett offers three essays on the significance of monologic ground, beginning with an article in the *American Journal of Semiotics*. Arnett (2012) elucidates ground as the dwelling place for the worldview that one brings to communicative engagements. The monologic nature of worldview, however, is not inactive or static but rather subject to change after acknowledgement of another. Arnett (2014) continues to emphasize the importance of monologue in the *Journal of Dialogue Studies*. Here, he articulates that dialogue without a recognition of monologic ground becomes an "ideology" non-responsive to the concrete other. Arnett (2015) returns to this notion in a keynote address at the 78<sup>th</sup> annual Ohio Communication Association convention. Here, he situates monologic ground as a driver of dialogue and source of human identity. Arnett contends that a disregard for monological ground imposes a false homogeneity, demanding that the world conform to individualistic impulses. A disregard of monologue corresponds with the erroneous assumption that all existential subjects hold the same beliefs.

Arnett (2022) carries forward the notion of ground through the metaphor of soil—a concept explored most thoroughly in his final book, *Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope: Contemporary Implications of the Scottish Enlightenment*.<sup>2</sup> Arnett ties soil to positionality and familiarity, often qualifying the metaphor with an emphasis on locality. The local soil to which Arnett refers could signal a connection to geographic location, institution, or community. His attentiveness to local soil reflects the lived reality of particular places and persons. Arnett connects local soil to tenacious hope, which counters the unbounded, abstracted, and unconditional aspirations of optimism. For Arnett, tenacious hope is linked to local soil through its creative acknowledgment of imagined possibilities that respond to practical needs and concrete limitations of a given place, time, and community. Consistent with existentialism's leaning toward the concreteness of

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<sup>2</sup> The mention of soil appears in his works on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hannah Arendt, and Emmanuel Levinas (Arnett 2005, 2013, 2017).

literature, Arnett's illustrates this understanding of local soil through the characters in Voltaire's famous novel *Candide*. Arnett references a scene from *Candide* in which the characters purchase a farm in rebellion against optimism. For Arnett, the farm presents the characters' daily struggle and hard work. As Arnett writes, "[t]he physical effort put into the soil gives them a trustworthy direction" as the abstracted promises of optimism fail (9). In the foreword to *Communication Ethics and Tenacious Hope*, Thomas M. Lessl interprets Arnett's concern for soil with the apt metaphor of gardening. This description announces a call to care for, tend, and nurture soil, emphasizing what particular persons bring to the ground upon which they stand.

Communicative care bridges Arnett's work on soil to his articulation of the mud of everyday life. Arnett (2007) explains that the mud of everyday life derives from Buber, who introduces the concept in *Tales of the Hasidim*. Here, Buber ([1947] 1991) recounts the teaching of Rabbi Shelomo on "climbing down"; he writes, "If you want to raise a man from mud and filth . . . You must go all the way down yourself, down into mud and filth" (277). In this shift, Arnett moves from a care for the ground/soil that positions the self to care for another. In so doing, Arnett frames the mud of everyday life as a context of intersubjective and interhuman meeting. His work with Arneson in *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age: Community, Hope, and Interpersonal Relationships* explicitly frames the mud of everyday life within this realm. They contend that this concept is an invitation to dialogue amid the "limits, flaws, and difficulties presented by the nitty-gritty reality of common life together in a situated historical moment" (Arnett and Arneson 1999, 32). An embrace of the mud of everyday life responds to a world that does not always match ideals or desires yet remains resolute to engage the world with hope. Annette Holba (2008) textures this notion by framing the mud of everyday life as the backdrop for Buber's I-It relationships; she contends that the concreteness and constraints of everyday encounters often necessitate the functionality of I-It relations. Referencing Arnett, Holba asserts that the value of the I-It exchanges reflect a functional care that can open spaces for dialogue.

Arnett demonstrates the usefulness of ground, soil, and mud in his four books on key figures relevant to the field of communication. Arnett's (2013) *Communication Ethics in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt's Rhetoric of Warning and Hope* provides a helpful example. In attending to ground, Arnett provides a detailed biography of Arendt's life with continuing acknowledgement of how the historical moment positioned her standpoint. Likewise, he articulates Arendt's own appreciation for the significance of ground alongside her critiques of modern impulses to eschew social and political challenges. For instance, Arnett contextualizes the emergence of *The Human Condition* in a Cold War moment in which the Russian launching of Sputnik prompted celebration for the possibility of escape; Arendt lamented this response, instead calling attention to labor, work, and action as the ground of the human condition. Furthermore, Arnett offered insights into what Arendt contributed to her own local soil. His chapter on *Eichmann in Jerusalem* details Arendt's coverage of this trial, which brought forth the widely controversial notion of the "banality of evil." Arendt considered the "banality of evil" to be commonplace in her modern historical moment

characterized by bureaucracy and thoughtlessness; her critique announced concrete limitations characterizing her historical moment. Finally, Arnett showcased how Arendt responded to the mud of everyday life. His chapter on Arendt's *Men in Dark Times* overviews figures whom she conceptualized as "holy sparks" – carriers of genuine rather than artificial light. Arnett describes Arendt's differentiation between these terms in a manner that echoes his juxtaposition between hope and optimism. Unlike optimism and artificial light's unbridled commitment to a brighter future, genuine light, like hope, responds to the mud of everyday life by engaging the messiness of conflict, disappointment, pain, and darkness. Just as one cannot appreciate the true beauty/genuine light of the stars when they are outshined by artificial light pollution, communicators have difficulty recognizing genuine meaning when met with abstracted notions of idealized connection. Arnett's scholarship is a representative case that illustrates a broader trend that clarifies the relationship between existentialism and communication.

## **Concluding Summary**

This work contends that Arnett's notions of the ground, soil, and mud of everyday life align with existentialist impulses that had significant influence on the history of philosophy of communication and dialogue. The first section of this article reviewed the anthologies of Kaufmann and Friedman to articulate major themes within existentialism. These works highlight the significance of the particularity of existential subjects and intersubjective meeting that announce a distinctive relevance to the field of communication. The second section recounted the history of the discipline and its relationship to existentialism. The third section situated ground, soil, and mud as existentialist concepts within Arnett's work. Consistent with existentialism, these metaphors engage the particularity of existential subjects that resists abstraction from the concreteness of human lives. Arnett's existentialist call for attentiveness to the ground, soil, and mud of everyday life reflects an ethical responsibility: the particularity and situatedness of communicators matters. The ground, soil, and mud of everyday life cannot be ignored. These metaphors provide clarity that allow one to meet another with the ability to push off of the concrete ground beneath one's feet, with an awareness of what can be contributed to the local soil, and with dialogic possibilities to move knee-deep through the mud of everyday life.

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## Corporate Communication Leadership and Ethics in the Mud of Everyday Life

Fr. Lazarus Langbiir, CSSp

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**Abstract:** The ethical significance of corporate communication leadership in the mud of everyday life is the focus of this paper. In today's world, human institutions and organizations rely primarily on corporate communication leadership to shape the way the public looks at them. They do so through strategic planning and control of day-to-day communicative activities, both internally and externally. Using *Corporate Communication Crisis Leadership: Advocacy and Ethics* by Ronald C. Arnett, Sarah M. Deluliis, and Michael Corr (2017) as my starting point and drawing from everyday examples, I suggest that constructive corporate communication leadership ought to be prioritized, protected, and promoted in the mud of everyday life. Current corporate communication leadership deals with internal and external audiences in an era of ethical dispute, especially rooted in social justice questions concerning issues such as gender inequality, race-based discrimination, and access to healthcare. In this era, organizations value diversity, flexibility, and responsiveness. Attentiveness to these values is an important reminder that corporate communication leaders must pay attention to the issues that matter to their various audiences and the environment within which they exist and function. Such leadership takes time to emerge and develop.

**Keywords:** corporate communication; thoughtful leadership; communication ethics; organizations; institutions; mud of everyday life

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### Introduction

This essay discusses the significance of corporate communication leadership in the mud of everyday life. The discussion centers on the need to be attentive to the effects that strategic corporate communication decisions can have on the everyday lives of people, especially stakeholders who are directly connected to the organizations or corporate institutions that make such decisions. Another goal of

this paper is to honor the work and legacy of Ronald C. Arnett,<sup>3</sup> whose scholarship on communication ethics and corporate communication leadership deals with issues that impact people in the mud of everyday life (e.g., Arnett 2022; Arnett, DeLuliis, and Corr 2017). Arnett demonstrates through his scholarship a commitment to the value of work and ideas. For example, Arnett (2018) traces the historical development of communication ethics, acknowledging the work done by previous scholars while offering his own thoughtful perspective and understanding of communication ethics.

Generally, institutions and organizations rely primarily on corporate communication to shape how they are perceived by the public through strategic planning and control of day-to-day communicative activities, both internally and externally. I liken these activities to human beings taking care of their bodies daily through personal hygiene, exercise, physical and mental healthcare, spiritual care, and interpersonal interaction. Organizations likewise take care of themselves to ensure their sustainability through planning, discipline, trust, ethical rhetoric, and a balance between safety and profit.

A key component of strategic corporate communication, especially in times of crisis, is leadership. I argue that the steps that organizational leaders take in critical strategic moments are significant and point to the ethical direction of the organization or institution. Therefore, I suggest that constructive strategic corporate communication leadership ought to be prioritized, protected, and promoted in the mud of everyday life.

My essay discusses the evolution of corporate communication as both a field of study and a practice that involves the ethical value of thoughtful leadership. The book *Corporate Communication Crisis Leadership: Advocacy and Ethics* by Ronald C. Arnett, Sarah M. DeLuliis, and Matthew Corr (2017) shows why corporate communication leadership is important. The ethical grounding and practical approach of this book makes it relevant for this discussion. According to the authors, ethical failure in leadership derives from flawed narratives, while constructive corporate communication leadership derives from the protection and promotion of essential ethical standards throughout the narratives that guide decision making at every level of the organization or corporate institution.

## **Corporate Communication: Evolution and Thoughtful Leadership**

Current corporate communication leadership deals with internal and external audiences in an era of ethical dispute. In this era, organizations value diversity, flexibility, and responsiveness. Corporate communication leaders must pay attention to these values as well as issues that matter to various stakeholders and

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the environment within which they exist and function. Any individual, group, or institution that has a vested interest in an organization is a stakeholder. A stakeholder can affect or be affected by the actions of the organization.

Also, through corporate communication, organizations present themselves as important institutions of society. Thus, corporate communication has become central to many businesses and organizations due to an increasingly global and highly competitive marketplace. As a result, organizational leaders are tasked with the responsibility of coordinating the communicative affairs of their institutions.

As a field of study, corporate communication is multidisciplinary in nature. Theories of corporate communication are developed and tested through engagement with other fields, such as marketing, business communication, advertising, and public relations. In addition, corporate communication theory pays close attention to developments in the world of organizations. Corporate communication scholars “cannot ignore trends and developments that are taking place in professional practice, whether such trends are based on scientific research or on the needs of society or on trends among stakeholders” (Elving 2012, 71).

Furthermore, corporate communication derives ideas and theories from disciplines such as rhetoric, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, economics, linguistics, psychology, and management. Thus, corporate communication leaders rely on different methods, findings, and principles as they attempt to innovate in response to the changing times. Corporate communication as a discipline has evolved through important historical epochs to become what it is today. Henry Cohen’s (1994) excursion through the early history of communication from the beginning of the First World War to the end of the Second World War and his sustained effort to call readers’ attention to the intellectual contribution of the discipline helps to provide a context for renewed and more meaningful examination of matters that influence inquiry.

Cohen’s (1994) account of the early history and development of communication also highlights the discipline’s dependence on various fields of study to provide research models for communication. Based on this, I argue that corporate communication has played a critical role in human interaction and the success of companies, organizations, and corporate institutions from its inception. Between the Industrial Revolution and the beginning of the Second World War, the world witnessed the introduction of mass production and consumption. With greater competition and robust markets emerging, organizations employed communication to sell their products and promote themselves. A growing number of top companies began reassessing their communication budgets and approaches. Some moved away from the traditional functional approach of public relations and advertising to pursue internal and external corporate communication strategies.

Corporate communication strategies deal with issues arising from the increased awareness that an organization’s communication is a part of the whole organization, and that the relationship an organization has with its external public requires careful management. The task of corporate communication is part of

every employee's role and not simply the function of marketing or public relations departments.

The evolution of communication in terms of definition, scope, and organization as outlined by Cohen and covering the period between 1914 and 1945 coincides with a number of significant social, economic, and political developments. Some of these dynamics triggered the emergence and evolution of corporate communication as a field of study and practice. The character of communication as a discipline underwent marked intellectual changes following the end of the Second World War (Cohen 1994). The effects of the social scientific revolution were obvious and somewhat inevitable. As a result, the discipline previously designed as group or public discussion underwent a visible transformation. The field became more sophisticated, and scholars became more concerned with the theoretical foundations that underlie their work. The overarching concept undergirding this transformation was known as communication theory, which contains principles that show the depth and diversity of the field.

Corporate communication is often defined in terms of other communication practices, including marketing communication, organizational communication, and management communication, and is used as an umbrella term for a field of practice that draws on multiple communication and management activities (Shelby 1993). Increasingly, however, corporate communication is regarded as a discipline with a distinct rationale and ambition. With the progression of society from hunting and gathering to commercialization, trade, and industrialization, complex organizations have emerged. The need for communication to facilitate the functioning and survival of these organizations has become increasingly more evident. Significantly, "the traditional potency of the family, the church, and the local community suddenly seemed dwarfed by the sway of the giant corporations" (Marchand 1998, 2). This was an important point in human history, especially in the West. As a result, corporations turned to corporate communication for life and purpose.

The evolution of corporate communication as a field of study took place throughout the twentieth century in schools of communication and journalism but within the scope of public relations and public affairs (Argenti 1996). The development of corporate communication as a discipline and practice happened concurrently. Some large corporations even have their own departments of corporate communication. Many scholars take the notion of corporate communication for granted and define it only indirectly by listing the different types of activities it encompasses, such as crisis communication, media relations, community relations, investor relations, employee relations, public affairs, and other communication activities traditionally associated with the broad field of public relations. Without clearly articulating the differences, scholarly and professional literature seem to imply that corporate communication is a more contemporary and sophisticated version of public relations.

Although corporate communication used to be a rather vague term referring loosely to messages from major corporations, today it designates a specific way of thinking that may be applied to many, if not all, sorts of

organizations. Most of the basic concerns of corporate communication have remained the same over the years. Corporations began to present themselves as vital and benevolent parts of society. In the academy, departments began to argue about who should control corporate communication education. According to Paul A. Argenti (1996), the quarrel has been among business, communication, and journalism schools. Each school claims that corporate communication logically belongs to it. While expanding their scope of study, communication schools began to claim that corporate communication properly belongs to their discipline. Then, business schools entered the debate by focusing on corporate communication as a subset of management communication. Wherever the home of corporate communication may be in the academy, its purpose remains the same.

From the beginning, the aim of corporate communication in theory and practice has been social legitimacy (Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney 2008). The goal is to manage all communication that involves an organization as a corporate entity. These include promoting, publicizing, and generally informing relevant individuals and groups in society about the organization's affairs. Rather than pursuing different identities in relation to different audiences or letting different departments handle their communication autonomously, the vision of contemporary corporate communication is to manage all communication under one banner. Corporate communication is ultimately about organizations and how they respond and adapt to the world around them by means of communication.

The idea of corporate communication may be likened to a body in search of a soul. In their 2008 work, Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney used this metaphor to describe corporate communication as a body with a voice and the ability to express itself. According to them, early corporate communications campaigns were like a "quest for a corporate soul" (15). This is because "toward the end of the nineteenth century, a growing number of voices in the USA regarded the big business corporation as a 'body' without a soul" (15). Thus, the distinct nature of corporate communication has less to do with the growing number of communication functions and disciplines it claims to subsume than with the vision it provides for contemporary management. The corporate communication process ensures that the interests of the organization are served but in a manner that guarantees a healthy relationship with all stakeholders. It is about strategy, image and reputation, vision, mission, stakeholders, persuasion, and meaning making.

Corporate communication differs from other types of communication management not simply because it claims to include a broader range of communication activities or to address more audiences across formal organizational boundaries but also because its *raison d'être* is to organize the corporation's communication activities as one coherent entity (Jackson 1987). In contrast to other types of organizational communication like advertising, employee communication, and technical communication, which typically address very specific audiences with discrete messages, corporate messages speak to many audiences at once in the hope of establishing and maintaining a favorable and coherent corporate reputation across different stakeholder groups.

The broad and somewhat diverse field of corporate communication is thus characterized by a common mindset, a certain way of thinking about and approaching an organization's communication shaped by images and ideals of unity, wholeness, and totality. In many ways, this mindset corresponds with the etymological roots of the adjective "corporate." Derived from the Latin *corpus*, "corporate" suggests a collective entity united into one body (Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney 2008, 6). Thus, labeling communication as "corporate" invokes a bodily metaphor of unity and totality. When we conceive of communication as a specifically corporate endeavor, we refer to the efforts of organizations to communicate as whole, total, and "bodily" entities (Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney 2008). In practice, this vision of wholeness unfolds into a goal of projecting a consistent and unambiguous image of what the organization "is" and stands for.

Although their formulations differ, corporate communication scholars argue fervently that organizations should aim for a unified, consistent voice across different markets and audiences. For example, Cees B. M. van Riel (1995) defined corporate communication as "an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonized as effectively and efficiently as possible," with the overall objective of creating "a favorable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent" (141). Joep Cornelissen (2008), on the other hand, defined corporate communication as a management function that offers a framework and vocabulary for the effective coordination of all means of communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favorable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent. The key task of corporate communication, therefore, is to flesh out the profile of the company behind the brand, to minimize discrepancies between different markers of corporate identity, to define and assign communication responsibilities across the organization, and to mobilize support behind corporate initiatives. Corporate communication, accordingly, defines a whole range of new managerial activities focused on the integration, coordination, and orchestration of an organization's communications.

With corporate communication, corporate institutions and organizations present themselves as social institutions with responsibilities and aspirations beyond commercial activities. A central characteristic of corporate communication as a field of research and practice is thus that it conceives of the organization as a single unit in communication with stakeholders. It is not individual managers, buildings, advertising campaigns, or interactions with employees that communicate in and of themselves. Rather, these are all seen as parts or fragments of the same communicating organization as a unit of analysis.

Wim J. L. Elving (2012) observes that organizations are well suited as laboratories for studying human communication and behavior. The introduction of information and communication technologies and the globalization of business in a networked society have created a need for monitoring and responding to the demands of consumers, employees, and other stakeholder groups. Activities such as coordination, knowledge creation, decision making, shareholder value, and

responsible citizenship are possible through communication. The term “corporate” might imply an excessive focus on profit, shareholders, and business, but it also refers to other organizations such as municipalities, governments, nonprofit organizations, hospitals, and universities. Even industrialized societies are presenting themselves as models of civilization. For such societies to achieve their egalitarian ambitions, they must allow for multiple voices and honor their various parts.

Corporate communication theory and practice is much more sophisticated today than it was at its inception. Some of the factors responsible for the complexity are external while others are internal. The external changes include advances in technology and the multiplication of stakeholders due to human progress. Internal changes are more strategic in nature and derive from the approaches practitioners want to adopt. Corporate communication serves other practical purposes, such as leading, motivating, persuading, and informing the public. The understanding of corporate communication as theory and practice is important because the two are interwoven. As a theory, it is both an art and a science built on concepts about communication that are developed and tested over time. As a practice, it follows new trends and best practices in the field. Corporate communication scholars rely on issues and developments taking place in the marketplace to generate new ideas in research that, in turn, drive practice. Also, corporate communication theory and practice is driven by a variety of subjects. Therefore, corporate communication gets more complex as the global business environment continues to develop.

An analysis of the corporate communication environment shows the importance of corporate communication and what it seeks to accomplish. As already discussed in this section, corporate communication has evolved over time and is concerned with both theory and practice. It involves both scholars and practitioners who operate within a certain environment, whether that environment is a community, country, organization, or field of study. Additionally, analyzing the corporate communication environment gives structure and meaning to what it seeks to accomplish. It helps decision makers to know the “why” of their actions. For example, Joel Bakan’s (2004) book *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* examines the history and character of the modern business corporation as a benevolent part of society. Bakan contends that corporations pursue their own economic self-interest without regard for the interests of individuals and society. Bakan, therefore, suggests that governments should regulate and control the actions of corporations, such as corporate reputation and stakeholder communication, for the good of society. Such demands, whether they come from scholars or interested stakeholders, require a response from corporations that operate in this environment.

According to Michael B. Goodman (1994), corporate communication exerts substantial influence in all transactions, from dealing with simple customer questions to the pressure of negotiating multinational mergers or restructuring a large corporation. To be successful, these tasks require the theoretical knowledge and practical acumen of the people involved. However, while people are essential for corporate communication, there are other elements involved in the

communication process that are equally important. In contemporary times, there are concerns surrounding issues such as diversity, sexual harassment, racism, terrorism, politics, and the environment that corporate communication cannot ignore. Organizations are sometimes compelled by stakeholder expectations to take a stand on such issues. Other times, the organizations themselves are proactive and respond to these issues through various strategic messages like mission statements, press releases, or by sponsoring events and programs that promote or resolve these concerns.

Organizational culture is another element that is important for corporate communication. Goodman (1994) argues that a strong corporate culture creates “a recognizable and positive perception of the company among its suppliers, vendors, and customers” (4). Stakeholders do not only expect to hear companies or organizations speak to issues—they also want to witness actions. Hence, companies must match their rhetoric with actions that support what they claim to represent. In their chapter “Justifying Corporate Communications,” Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney (2008) address the question, “How do contemporary organizations justify their engagement with corporate communications?” (112). In other words, what is the rationality behind the “bodily” pursuit in today’s communication?

Justifying corporate communication requires an understanding of the corporate communication environment. Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney (2008) believe that “communication is consequential, and the reading of a situation has implications for the solutions we are able to envision” (113). Hence, a clear understanding of the corporate communication environment means the ability to describe its reality through the best possible frame. Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney define framing as “the way we think about, approach, and talk about an issue, acknowledging that these are not neutral undertakings because they help shape perception of the issue” (113). Analyzing the corporate communication environment allows us to openly discuss and challenge or support its ideals. There is so much invested in the corporate communication environment. The corporate communication process and its actions are related to economics, society, and humanity at large. Knowing its importance helps with understanding its concepts and purpose.

Corporate communication thus becomes the solution to the limitations of the corporate communication environment. In today’s complex and ever-changing world, organizations are faced with ongoing issues such as globalization, uncertainty, and turbulence. Hence, there is an obvious and persistent demand for current corporate communication theory and practice to be flexible. Organizations themselves are complex bodies with many parts. Therefore, although the project of corporate communication pursues standardization, it simultaneously must cultivate *internal* differences to see observable differences in its *external* environment. Also, the notion of integration is challenged by findings that organizations contain buffers and loose couplings, just like a complex living organism (Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney 2008, 177). A healthy combination of tight and loose couplings enables the organization to develop close relations with its environment and at the same time protect itself against external

uncertainty. In a tightly coupled system, the different parts of an organization are standardized, while in a loosely coupled system, the different parts of the organization are flexible and adaptable.

In corporate communication, stakeholders are not dormant recipients of corporate messages but active participants in a process that builds both commercial and social relationships. Corporate communication is a valuable tool for enhancing a company's reputation and fostering relationships with stakeholders. Therefore, organizations must understand and be able to work with these different groups of people, however varied and complex they may be. To ensure their survival and maintain their vitality, contemporary corporate organizations must appreciate and nurture both their collective and individual parts.

### **Exemplar of Corporate Communication Leadership in the Mud of Everyday Life**

The "mud of everyday life" is a phrase used by Martin Buber and adopted by Arnett in his teaching and scholarship. In *Between Man and Man* ([1947] 2002) and *I and Thou* ([1937] 1958), Buber used the phrase to refer to the everyday creaturely life of man that does not separate existence from its world or isolate the self into a freely moving I. For Arnett, a scholar on Buber, the metaphor "mud of everyday life" refers to the practical and often messy realities of daily human existence. This understanding is central to Arnett's work in communication ethics (e.g., Arnett 2012, 2013, 2017). For Arnett, meaningful dialogue and communication ethics are grounded in the complexities and challenges of everyday life. I use the same metaphor in this paper to suggest that ethical behavior emerges from navigating, not avoiding, the challenges of everyday life.

An example of corporate communication leadership in the mud of everyday life can be found in the communication response(s) to the BP *Deepwater Horizon* crisis that happened over a decade ago. Using this crisis as a classic case study, Arnett, Deluliis, and Corr's (2017) *Corporate Communication Crisis Leadership: Advocacy and Ethics* explicates the dangers of corporate communication leadership failure and provides us with theoretical foundations as well as practical pathways to constructive corporate communication leadership built on tenacious advocacy and ethical rhetoric. The perspective of this book challenges some conventional corporate communication practices, such as extreme focus on profit and withholding or distorting information to protect the image of an organization. This book helps further expand upon the importance of corporate communication leadership in the mud of everyday life.

The BP *Deepwater Horizon* disaster happened on April 20, 2010, in the Gulf of Mexico near Louisiana. At the time of the disaster, 126 workers were on board the *Horizon*. By the time the rescue operation was over, eleven workers were unaccounted for, hundreds of families were emotionally affected, and a nation was confronted with a crisis. Seven years later, Arnett, Deluliis, and Corr (2017) returned to this crisis with constructive scholarly insight to examine thoroughly

the root causes of the disaster. With the view that crisis is generally not spontaneous, they traced some of the warning signs that signaled the inevitability of escalation. Key among the warning signs was a narrative of profit, developed over time, that eclipsed a commitment to safety.

The fundamental argument of the authors is that tragedies such as the BP *Deepwater Horizon* disaster have pragmatic implications and significant lessons for corporate communication ethics. They present the BP crisis as a warning against unproductive issue, argument, and conflict engagement. They also suggest a corporate communication environment that is attentive to communication ethics in action. Communication ethics allows the interplay of narrative setting and everyday practices to create a space where constituencies develop, refine, and mold an understanding that reflects appropriate reactions to issues.

According to the authors, issues make up the fundamental stage that carries the possibilities for actualizing arguments, conflicts, and crises in the marketplace. They can spiral into arguments when public deliberation and advocacy concerning a particular problem or opportunity has not yet reached a satisfactory solution. Arguments that are ignored escalate into conflicts between and among internal and external organizational stakeholders. Conflicts within and between organizations and stakeholders define and redefine shared interests, values, and obligations. Crisis is the final step, evolving from issue, argument, and conflict.

*Corporate Communication Crisis Leadership* offers us a lens through which we can understand how issues that are not properly addressed can escalate into crises, such as the BP *Deepwater Horizon* disaster, the 2008 financial crisis, the COVID-19 global pandemic, or the war in Ukraine. In general, the book identifies corporate greed as a precursor to many of the missteps and ethical failures that have resulted in unimaginable physical, financial, emotional, and sometimes spiritual pain for society and stakeholders.

*Corporate Communication Crisis Leadership* also provides readers with a series of theories and strategies that can help stop issues from becoming a devastating crisis. These recommendations present organizations with ideas that can alter at any critical moment the progression from issue to crisis. They invite organizational leaders to commit to changing the narratives that guide their decision making and to transform their communication with stakeholders from thoughtlessness to thoughtfulness.

The first recommendation is to seek clarity. This involves explaining issues, arguments, conflicts, and crisis in their proper context. The act of clarifying demands that organizations frame meaning, highlight the significance of that meaning, and offer a strategic path to discern what matters for internal and external constituencies. Clarity of issues, argument, conflict, and crisis help organizational leaders to attend to locality, context, and industry. Issues emerge within an environment and are always composed of interested constituents that organizations cannot ignore. Such stakeholders shape the significance, texture, and understanding of issues and help leadership to recognize issues as foreground situations that consist of historical context, organizational mission, corporate and

industry identity, and an organizational culture shaped by a shared value system. A failure to attend to issues leads to argument, conflict, and ultimately crisis.

The second recommendation is that corporate communication leadership should align theoretical and strategic perspectives with the mission and direction of organizations in order to counteract thoughtlessness and unreflective behavior.

The third and final recommendation is communication ethics in action in which the authors offer the BP crisis as an example of thoughtlessness. For Arnett, communication ethics in action requires thoughtful, reflective engagement with conflicting perspectives and contrasting standpoints.

I suggest that constructive corporate communication leadership ought to be prioritized, protected, and promoted in the mud of everyday life. Communication ethics leadership drives meaning and purpose in the everyday mud of life, and corporate communication leadership cannot presume that meaning and purpose always stay with people. Hence, *Corporate Communication Crisis Leadership* is an invitation to advocate tenaciously for corporate communication with an ethical foundation. The mud of everyday life is composed of challenges such as the BP *Deepwater Horizon* crisis. A true understanding of the world around us and ethical behavior in times of such crisis must move us to engage with, rather than avoid, the everyday life challenges before us. Such an engagement will lead to meaningful dialogue and create an environment in which corporate communication grounded in communication ethics and the values that matter can emerge and thrive.

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## The Wild Child and the Voice of the Other

Richard H. Thames

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**Abstract:** The 1970 discovery in Los Angeles of a thirteen-year-old girl so isolated by her parents that she never learned to speak coincided with the opening of Francois Truffaut's *The Wild Child* about the 1798 discovery of an apparently mute twelve-year-old boy living in the Aveyron woods. Professionals responsible for "Genie" were inspired by the tale of Jean Marc Gaspard Itard's living and working with "Victor," but in neither case was the reality as rosy as the film depicts. Our bodies learn language only by hearing it and only by a certain age. We respond to the voices of others, which call us out of ourselves and into ourselves, into conversation and community. There is a gratitude we owe to those who would bestow upon us the gift of speech, a mutuality among us, a reciprocity residing at the roots of our being, befittingly obliging our regard, our grateful response, to those who would call us into dialogue and our distinctive consciousness.

**Keywords:** Aristotle; Burke, Kenneth; body; attentiveness; hearing; tameness; pointing

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For Ron Arnett

### Introduction

In the winter of 1970, French screenwriter and director Francois Truffaut released *L'enfant sauvage* (*The Wild Child*), a film in which he also starred as Dr. Jean Marc Gaspard Itard. Personally concerned with problems of child neglect and abuse, Truffaut had been inspired by Lucien Malson's 1964 book, *Les enfants sauvages: Mythe et réalité* (*Wild Children: Myth and Reality*), which cites the case of a young boy hunted down with dogs after being spotted naked in the woods of Aveyron in the summer of 1798 and brought to the National Institute for the Deaf, a school for the deaf and mute outside Paris. Christened "Victor" by the staff and estimated to be twelve years old, the boy was examined by Itard who found that he might not speak but did hear. Some colleagues believed the boy to be retarded or insane and advocated his committal to a mental institution. But Itard theorized that the boy's behavior could be explained by his having been isolated in the woods at an early age and volunteered to take him in, with the aid of his housekeeper, to be

civilized. The film *The Wild Child* was based on Itard's *Memoire et rapport sur Victor de L'Aveyron* published in 1806.<sup>4</sup> Because of Itard's diary, Victor's case is one of the most documented of wild children in history.

The film was beautifully photographed in black and white, its composition obviously influenced by Truffaut's extensive screening of silent films (e.g., a recurring "closing iris" technique reminiscent of the era). The dialogue was minimalist, the film hardly needing subtitles as so much was communicated visually. Solo recorder music written by Vivaldi complemented the visuals superbly.

Only one problem—the real story was not quite as romantic as Truffaut would have us believe. Victor flourished at first under Itard's tutelage, but his progress eventually slowed. He learned to read simple words but never really learned to talk. Itard ended the experiment, asking his housekeeper to take in the boy at her house down the street from the school. There he lived a rather forlorn existence until his death in 1828 (Garmon 1994).

## A Potential Called Forth

In the fall of 1970, an English subtitled version of *The Wild Child* premiered at the Los Feliz theatre in Hollywood—one week after social workers in the suburb of Arcadia charged a pair of elderly parents with child abuse and took into custody their thirteen-year-old daughter, who had been locked in a room tied to a potty chair and forced to sit, day after day and often through the night, with little to look at and no one to talk to for most of her life. Like Victor, she had never learned to speak, having been beaten whenever she made noise. The father shot himself shortly after authorities discovered the girl; the mother, herself weak and nearly blind, claimed to have also been a victim of her domineering husband.

The girl was taken to Children's Hospital in Los Angeles, where she won the hearts of doctors and scientists. She became known as "Genie," named for a creature that emerges from a bottle into human society past childhood (Garmon 1994; see also the *extensive* Wikipedia entry on "Genie (Feral Child)").

A team was quickly assembled to rehabilitate Genie, and funding was obtained from the National Institute of Mental Health. Consultants from across the country were invited to a special conference that involved a private screening of Truffaut's film, which awed and inspired the attendees (Garmon 1994).

Like Victor, Genie seemed to thrive at first, then her progress slowed, and funds dried up. Genie had a personal quality that early on elicited rescue fantasies. Team members vied to be foster parents, but not all of them could separate her care from their ambition to be the next Annie Sullivan (Helen Keller's teacher) or Itard (who had been criticized for his ambition vis-à-vis Victor, ironically enough even by members of Genie's own team). Genie's mother eventually sought to

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<sup>4</sup>The book is available for free from Google Books as *An Historical Account of the Discovery and Education of a Savage Man: Or, the First Developments, Physical and Moral, of the Young Savage Caught in the Woods Near Aveyron in the Year 1798*.

resume care but quickly found it too difficult. Genie suffered a series of placements in foster homes, in some of which she was abused for her unsocialized behaviors. She regressed. Then her mother sued the team and Children's Hospital for excessive and outrageous treatment. Genie now lives in an adult foster care home, the sixth since the project ended, her care supported by a private foundation (Garmon 1994).

## **“Bodies that are genetically endowed with the ability to learn language”**

What has any of this to do with Kenneth Burke? Burke defines us as “bodies that are genetically endowed with the ability to learn language.”<sup>5</sup> We usually rush to the definition's last term, language, passing over the fact that we are *bodies* genetically endowed with a capacity and that the capacity must be developed, the potential must be actualized. What does it mean to be a *body* that learns language, and what is involved in that body's *learning* it?

Burke touches on these issues early on, though he may not yet have had answers. In his 1925 essay “The Poetic Process,” he argued that “just as there is inborn in the germ-plasm of a dog the potentiality of barking, so there is inborn in the germ-plasm of man the *potentiality of speech*” (Burke 1968, 48, emphasis added)—a position consistent with the Aristotelian “naturalism” (a.k.a. “realism”).<sup>6</sup> Burke's “bodies that learn language” is sometimes supposed to be a redefinition of his earlier, more familiar “symbol-using animals” (Burke 1984, 303). Seeking in the 1930s and 40s to counterbalance a period impressed with behaviorism, Burke did define us as *symbol-using* animals, stressing the *difference* between the human organism and others. Seeking in the 1980s to counterbalance a period increasingly impressed with language (due to his own influence?), he apparently redefined us as “*bodies that learn language*,” stressing the *similarity* (Burke 1984, 295; Brock et al. 1985, 27–28). Whatever his stress, the two definitions are essentially one—a traditional *per genus* (animal) *et differentiam* (symbolic) (Burke 1969a). In defining us specifically as symbol-using, Burke insists that descriptions of our behavior stress symbolic motives that prove to be more than

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<sup>5</sup> Burke used this phrase in a dinner conversation with the author and Barbara Biesecker on November 5, 1987, at the Speech Communication Association (now National Communication Association) convention in Boston. See Burke's (1985) essay “In Haste”: “our bodies being physiologically in the realm of nonsymbolic motion, but genetically endowed with the ability to learn a kind of verbal behavior I call symbolic action” (330).

<sup>6</sup> Frank Macke (2016) found over 4,000 articles on “embodiment,” only thirty of which mention Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The figures might be worse for Burke. The issues of embodiment that arise in the work of the great French phenomenologist also arise in the forgotten American tradition of naturalism (also known as realism—Burke's preferred term—the new realism, critical realism, American realism, and combinations of these terms) to which Burke was introduced at Columbia—a tradition of which pragmatism was but a part, though somehow the larger tradition has vanished and the smaller has become more than it initially was. There is common ground aplenty to be profitably explored between Burke and Merleau-Ponty, between the French and American approaches.

mere projections of our animal nature—his audience being materialists who reduce action to motion. In defining us as generically animal, Burke (1984) insists that descriptions of our symbolic behavior be rooted in, though not reduced to, biological conditions—his audience being idealists who make of the distinction between motion and action a functional dualism between motion and action-minus-motion, thereby assuming a body-mind split, which Burke himself repeatedly denied. Burke's supposed redefinition might be better characterized as a reemphasis of the biological, Aristotelian roots of his system. His more complete definition—"bodies that are genetically endowed with the ability to learn language"—clearly returns him to his 1925 claim.

For both Aristotle and Burke, language is a capacity that must be developed, a *potentiality* that must be *actualized*. That potential exists *within* each of us but is actualized only *among* us. We differ from all other animals. We *speak* only because we have been *spoken to*. We are called into consciousness and conversation and community. We are called out of *physis* into a potential actualized in *nomos*. As such animal bodies, we learn language only from other animal bodies who already use it.

For Aristotle, the efficient cause of an oak is another oak. But once fallen, the acorn develops on its own. The efficient cause of a chicken is other chickens. But animals are more complex, requiring nurture after birth. The body that learns language is a completely different kind of animal. A chicken or a fox is a chicken or a fox no matter what. Its course from chick or pup to adult is biological. The efficient cause of a human being is other human beings. But our course from infant to adult is not only *biological* but also *linguistic, cultural, and historical*. Unless we are called into language, that course is arrested. We become "the wild child," the "feral" child, Victor of Aveyron or Genie of Los Angeles. Brain development is arrested; some parts never grow, others atrophy. There is an optimal time for learning language—even for the limited learning of our primate relatives in labs (Kenneally 2007).

The manner in which language is acquired and the manner by which its acquisition is manifested imply much about language and human nature. In addition, study of pre-linguistic traits in other animals and surmise concerning the evolution of language represent significant supplements to the study of language's acquisition and manifestation.

The first sign of language is usually a *gesture*. Gesture always intrigued Burke. In the 1930s, he was taken with Sir Richard Paget's gesture theory of speech not so much because it was a good theory but because gesture exists at the juncture between body and mind. From that juncture we can look backward into the body and organic development (or evolution) and forward into the mind and linguistic development.

Gesture is not uniquely human; it plays a large part in primate communication. But human gesture is unique: we are the only animals that truly *point*. Indeed, our first communication is usually a gesture and our second a word combined with it—pointing to a cup and saying "milk," reaching out and saying "ball." Apes point too but, significantly, with the whole hand rather than a finger because they lack the dexterity of humans (Kenneally 2007).

Pointing is a matter of manual dexterity that paleontologists correlate with brain capacity (Ritter and Haschke 2015). The fine motor skills involved in pointing with the index finger require a larger, more highly developed brain than apes or our common ancestors possess. Such is also the case with vocal production.

For example, an inherited speech disorder associated with two genes dubbed FOXP2 results in immobility in the lower portion of the face, including the lips, tongue, and mouth, impairing articulation. In simple repetition tests, “reproducing sounds and words in the correct sequence, selecting the right sounds for words and maintaining an appropriate rhythm” proves troublesome—more so with multi-syllabic words, especially unfamiliar ones. In brain scans, regions typically active appear inactive and vice versa (Kenneally 2007, 192–93).

FOXP2 was the first, and so far the only, gene linked to an inherited speech disorder. It is a gene that manages other genes, a high-order gene “often connected with changes at the level of the whole organism” (Keannelly 2007, 197). In the brain, “its pattern of expression appears to be specific to regions involved with the development of motor control,” but it also expresses itself in the development of the heart, lungs, and other tissues (317n6). We share 98% of our genes with chimps; the 2% unique to human beings would appear to include high-order genes. Speaking is clearly associated with one such gene—FOXP2. Pointing quite reasonably can be associated with such a gene, as well.

My point is that the human being is not simply an animal with *logos*, a body that learns language; language is not simply an add-on, a top-off, nor is its emergence mostly a matter of more brains. The human being is a different kind of animal, not the third chimpanzee. A fish is made to swim; a bird is made to fly. The whole human organism is made to learn and use language. To learn and use language is to exercise our being, language being embodied not just in our brains but in our very core.

My point implies many things we have no time to explore here. For example, how do we account for the importance of rhythm or rhyme? Burke relates form to natural body rhythms (e.g., the heart’s systole and diastole, its filling and contracting). As for rhyme, Grimm’s laws of language change suggest that words produced in a similar fashion may be related and even stored in the same locations in our brains, explaining why rhyme may have power or suggesting layers of private meaning. Burke argues that the pleasing quality of a line from Samuel Taylor Coleridge—“bathed by the mist”—is due to the subtlety of its alteration (Burke 1974, 369–70). His explanation draws on Grimm’s laws (i.e., the close relationship of “b” to “m” and of “th” (voiced and unvoiced) to “d” and “t”). The explanation holds even more with rhyme and half rhyme than with alteration.

Along the same lines, I. A. Richards (1936) observes that the association of sound- and therefore spoken-alikes—not strictly homonyms (e.g., malapropisms, spoonerisms) but what he dubs the “interinanimation” of words—explains the peculiar force of certain words and the impossibility of their complete translation (47–65). How does one translate a pun? W. H. Auden claims that good poets (à la Shakespeare) have a weakness for bad puns. The plot of *Much Ado about Nothing* involves accidental and deliberate eavesdropping (appropriately, “nothing” was

at the time pronounced more like “noting”). One might translate the words “light” and “night” but not their spoken/heard association. Burke points to the association between “Marie” (the mother of God), “mer” (the sea), and “merde” (“fecal matter”) in French, then notes that T. S. Eliot, who knew French, may well have associated “merde” with *Murder in the Cathedral*. Arguing that continual sexual intimacy with a woman begets pet names, Burke wonders if the name of Augustine’s mistress is related to his constant reference to her as his “toy.” Burke often referred to his second wife as his “better half”; her maiden name (like her sister’s and his first wife’s) was Batterham. Hermeneutic issues are manifold.

When we first speak, language arises from within us— but not just any language, rather the language first spoken to us, the language first heard. That specific language calls us out of ourselves and into ourselves—into our specific humanity, into our moment and place. We are called into our own historically situated bodies by listening and responding to the voice of the other, be it antique Latin, Middle English, or Modern French.

It has been said that no great poet is found in a language other than the one in which she or he first said “mother.” The saying bespeaks a physical intimacy with our mother tongue that is belied by our tendency to speak and think abstractly about language in general rather than the particular one we speak. Burke himself seeks to articulate the meta-biological laws of all language. But his discussion of the particulars I have mentioned tend to be the more controversial and least appreciated elements of his system.

Returning to gesture and looking forward into the mind and linguistic development, apes point but only in captivity and only for humans, not for other apes. Unlike humans, apes do not attend to one another’s gestures. Apes encouraged to use sign-language with other apes have sign-language “shouting contests” rather than conversations (Kenneally 2007).

How do we explain human attentiveness genetically? Perhaps by the emergence of mirror neurons—neurons that fire both when an animal acts and when the animal observes the same action performed by another, thus “mirroring” the behavior of the other, as though the observer were her or himself acting. There may be mirror neurons associated with listening that are particularly human. Such neurons may in turn be due to another higher order gene—a gene that manages other genes.

For example, when Siberian fur enterprises began selectively breeding tamer captive animals, they were surprised by the emergence of characteristics other than tameness, such as changes in coat color and even morphology.<sup>7</sup> Domesticated dogs may have emerged from wild wolf populations through self-selection. Tamer wolves lurking around garbage dumps on the edges of human settlements may have been adopted and bred, with changes also emerging in coat color and even morphology—all the differences we see between wild and domesticated populations emerging over generations. Tameness appears to be

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<sup>7</sup> This has been widely reported on. See Wikipedia’s entry on “Domesticated Silver Fox.” Of late, some have challenged these findings. See Jake Buehler (2019).

associated with higher order genes. Attentiveness may quite reasonably be so associated, as well. Thus, a characteristic essential to learning and using language may be associated with more than attentiveness and therefore may be more deeply embodied than one would suppose.

Mike Tomasello of the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig believes humans are particularly cooperative in the way they communicate (Kenneally 2007). Chimpanzees (unlike domesticated dogs) do not respond to an experimenter's pointing helpfully to one barrel that contains food as opposed to another that is empty, but they do respond to his reaching as if to grab that barrel—suggesting a difference in the balance of cooperation and competition within species. Tomasello believes human beings have evolved into “a species for whom an experience means little unless it is shared,” whereas chimpanzees have evolved along a different path (Kenneally 2007, 128–29). We are not the most *competitive* of animals but rather the most *cooperative*.

## A Dialogic Ethic?

Human beings are not so much animals that *speak* as they are animals that *listen*. There is something within us prior to language or at its very root that makes us different. There are no Hobbesian pre-political humans. We do not become what we are in *solitude*.

We are Aristotelian *political* animals—that which is *apolis* being either a beast or a god. We learn linguistic *communication* only within linguistic *communities*. We *speak* only because we have been *spoken to*. More exactly, we *speak* because we *listen*. And there must be a particular language that we hear—be it English, German, Spanish, Italian, French, or any of the more than 7,000 languages spoken today, as well as others deemed “dead.”

We respond to the *voice of the other*, calling us out of ourselves and into ourselves. When we speak, language arises from *within*, but language itself resides *among* us. In a sense, each of us resides among us. Inside and out, internal and external, within and among are not as easily distinguished as we would suppose.

There is a gratitude we owe to those who would bestow upon us the gift of speech. There is a mutuality among us, a reciprocity residing at the roots of our being, befittingly obliging our regard, our grateful response, to those who would call us out of and into ourselves, who would call us into our very humanity—the *voices of others*.

Hobbes and his contemporaries sought a naturalistic base upon which to build a new morality, but that base exists not outside of but rather within the polis in the acquisition of speech (Thames and Mancino 2018; Thames 2023).

## Conclusion and Extrapolations

Each of us is initially called into our finished nature (our *entelechia*) by *the voice of the other*. But is there something that calls us out of Nature Itself, calls us into our *genus* and further into our *specific* life, calls us out of Nature into our potential for

creating a *second nature* in imitation of Nature Itself, calls us out of *phusis* into our potential for *nomos*?

In the distant past, writes Burke ([1974] 2003), “our anthropoid ancestors underwent a momentous mutation. In their bodies (as physiological organisms in the realm of motion) there developed the ability to learn the kind of tribal idiom” he refers to as “symbolic action” (142). And that mutation that “makes speech possible is itself inherited in our nature as physical bodies” (142).

But Burke suggests elsewhere that we emerge not merely by mutation, not just by chance. In a passage shamefully neglected by Burke scholars, at the end of Part II of the *Rhetoric* (always pay close attention to Burke’s endings and beginnings), Burke (1969b) asks what the ground of speech would be. His answer: There is

mystery in the “infancy” of the “unconscious,” nonverbal, postverbal, and superverb. By the nonverbal we mean the visceral; by postverbal the unutterable complexities to which the implications of words themselves give rise. . . . And if we go through the verbal to the outer limits of the verbal, the superverb would comprise whatever might be the jumping-off place. It would be not nature minus speech, but nature as the ground of speech, hence *nature as itself containing the principle of speech*. Such an inclusive nature would be more-than-verbal rather than less-than-verbal. (180, emphasis original)

And in the *Rhetoric*’s concluding (and likewise shamefully neglected!) passage, he coyly suggests even more. There he calls upon us to

observe all about us, forever goading us, though it be in fragments, the motive that attains its ultimate identification in the thought, not of the universal holocaust, but of the universal order—as with the rhetorical and dialectical symmetry of the Aristotelian metaphysics, whereby all classes of beings are hierarchically arranged in a chain or ladder or pyramid of mounting worth, each kind striving towards the *perfection* of its kind, and so towards the kind next above it, while the strivings of the entire series head in God as the *beloved* cynosure and sinecure, the end of all desire. (333, emphasis added)

We are animals with *logos*, housed and hidden within Nature<sup>8</sup> until we are called forth by *eros*,<sup>9</sup> until we are drawn forth by Love.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ernesto Grassi argues (perhaps like Burke) that as animals with *logos* we are called forth out of Nature, though not having read much Grassi since 1986 (when I read a lot!), I have searched in vain for the citation.

<sup>9</sup> See Plato’s *Symposium*.

<sup>10</sup> There is an interesting allusion to Aristotle toward the end of Christopher Nolan’s (2014) film *Interstellar*, where Anne Hathaway’s character argues, “Love isn’t something we invented, it’s observable, powerful. It has to mean something. . . . Something we can’t yet understand. Maybe it’s some evidence, some artifact of a higher dimension that we can’t consciously perceive. . . . Love is the one thing we’re capable of perceiving that transcends dimensions of time and space. Maybe we should trust that even if we can’t understand it yet.”

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***Human Dialogue (volume 5 of Towards a Universal Civilization series), Michael H. Mitias, Peter Lang, 2023, 202 pages, ebook/paperback \$56.95***

Reviewed by Melba Vélez Ortiz

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As I write this review, the American Civil Liberties Union reports that the US Supreme Court has declined a protestor's rights case that many describe as effectively abolishing the right to mass protest in three states: Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. As legacy media frets over the fascist future that awaits the nation with the likely reelection of Donald Trump in November, the Biden administration, the US Supreme Court, and college campuses all over the nation continue to strangle the right to protest inside and outside campuses. For example, ABC News, the Associated Press, and Democracy Now! report that pro-Palestinian protests are sweeping US college campuses following mass arrests at Columbia, NYU, and Yale University. Even the *Chronicle of Higher Education* is posing the question: "When are appeals to campus safety an excuse to suppress speech?" (Hicks 2024). Amidst this clamping down on US citizens' First Amendment right to assembly, Michael H. Mitias's *Human Dialogue* in Peter Lang's *Towards a Universal Civilization* series provides a timely reminder that human dialogue is more than a fundamental feature of our humanity; it is its very ontic essence.

To be clear, Mitias does not address the question of whether mass protests can be considered a form a rational human dialogue, but the idea that human reality and human excellence is tied to our ability to anchor our humanity in conversation, to the author of this review, seems relevant to a critique of the current repressive environment that permeates US culture. If Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1968) was right that a riot is the language of the unheard, then it stands to reason that protests and even riots are, in fact, evidence of a grave lack of listening, mutual understanding, and acknowledgement in the social conversation. Put differently, if we follow Mitias's argument in this book, such a coordinated and comprehensive suppression of speech is also an affront to our collective humanity.

Mass protests, in particular, signal a profound discontent that, rather than being addressed through human dialogue, becomes punishable by law. To protest, etymologically, means to assert publicly, and on this basis a protest can be

considered a collective utterance made by a collective subject that, when reciprocated and engaged, can be transformed into dialogue. Thus, while Mitias does not treat the subject of political and communicative repression in *Human Dialogue*, he presents the thesis that to be a human being is to participate in an ongoing, dynamic, unfolding, continuous conversation with other humans and the surrounding world. If this is the case, then any measure that restricts and prosecutes human dialogue (even in the form of a peaceful mass protest) becomes relevant to a discussion of the repercussions of his argument.

Mitias (2023) himself describes this book as an elucidation and defense of four main propositions: (a) that human nature is essentially rational; (b) that rational nature is a conversation; (c) that as the essential fabric of human nature, reason exists as a potentiality in the formal organization of the human body; and finally, (d) that at the individual and collective levels, humanity grows and develops in the medium of conversation (17). In many ways, *Human Dialogue* feels like a culmination of the meticulous and sustained work Mitias has done on universalism as a metaphilosophy since 2008. The philosophical project of this book is unequivocally normative and universalist in its locus, much like philosophical predecessors such as G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Socrates, and contemporary communication ethicists such as Clifford G. Christians. Universalism is often the target of unfair criticisms of rigidity, ahistoricity, and hegemony, but Mitias easily avoids these superficial criticisms by first searching for and then anchoring his ontology on a feature of human experience that is indeed common to us all: human conversation. In other words, Mitias locates the meaning of human existence in conversation because, in his analysis, it is this human event that is most comprehensive and fundamental to human nature, as all human cultures, institutions, and, importantly, ideals result from engaging it. Unlike Kant, who proposed that all human beings are rational, Mitias argues that rationality is the product of human conversation that comprises three distinct faculties or capacities: the intellect, affection, and volition. In this way, Mitias veers from Kant's formulation by positing that rational conversation, as the instantiation of the ideal of human rationality, results from active engagement with the three aforementioned faculties, not a human reality given a priori or before experience.

Mitias's thesis is that human essence (ontology) is a rational conversation. He premises this proposition first and foremost in the claim that human nature is essentially rational. Mitias does not mean "rational" in the formal, epistemologically rational way of continental philosophy but in a novel way that is interwoven with both the affective and the volitional. In other words, while Mitias's concept of rationality does align with formal epistemological rationalism insofar as he believes, in his first premise, that reality is knowable through reason and that reason should and does take precedence over intuition or sense perception, he breaks with formal rationalism conceptually by abandoning the certainty to which rationalism lays claim in favor of a version of rational dialogue that functions primarily as the individual and collective vehicle by which to discover a co-constructed reality. Thus, by offering a revised concept of human rationality, Mitias moves to defend his second premise: that rational nature is a conversation.

This second premise should not be confused with Aristotle's answer to human ontology. Aristotle describes human beings as speaking animals and consequently locates the nature of our humanity in our ability to speak. Mitias takes this idea a step further by asserting that to be human is to be in conversation, not just in speech. The implications of this shift are significant. Whatever specialness human beings have, for Mitias, is a result of their ability not just to express themselves symbolically, but to understand themselves as ever-changing and dynamic. To be in conversation, Mitias says, in any type of human dialogue or conversation means that "the dialogist should act as a human being and treat the other dialogist as a human being" (8). This aligns with Immanuel Kant's ([1797] 2017) Formula of Humanity (FoH), in which he theorizes that human beings' inherent rationality means that one should "[s]o act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (67, 4:429). In the FoH, Kant addresses all human interaction, while Mitias is laser-focused on dialogue (i.e., conversation), because he posits that the defining feature of our humanity is conversation, not rationality qua rationality.

In sum, the preceding is a nuanced point that must be appreciated as such. While Mitias aligns with formal rationalism in his attribution of reason as the ultimate arbiter of what is true and false, Mitias is equally insistent that truth is an ideal that is co-created in dialogue, rejecting the finality and certitude of continental rationalism (e.g., Spinoza). He defines dialogue as a conversation between two or more persons engaged in an ongoing process of discovery. Therefore, following Socrates, Mitias (2023) understands dialogue (and conversation) as art and a necessary feature for the advancement of human civilization (252).

Mitias's third premise is that reason, as the essential fabric of human nature, exists as a potentiality in the formal organization of the human body. Here Mitias is more or less in alignment with formal rationalism insofar as the human intellect, and morality as an extension of that intellect, takes precedence over sense perception. In this way, Mitias delves into the epistemological aspects of his thesis. To know is not to intuit or to perceive through our senses (all located in the body). To reduce reality to sense perception is to confine human reality to that of another species of animal. Animals operate by instinct; humans are pure potentiality. In other words, *what is* is not a given but a co-creation between cognizing, emotional, and willful beings who treat each other as inherently valuable co-creators or embodied minds.

Lastly, Mitias puts forth his fourth and final premise: that at the individual and collective levels, humanity grows and develops in the medium of conversation. This is, in my view, a hopeful apex to his postulation of universal civilization. He begins the book by positing dialogue as a human event that generates power. For, unquestionably, there is power in co-creating reality. Indeed, how else could we describe the achievements with which Mitias credits human conversation? In his own words, "since human nature is the unity of the capacities of intellect, which aims at the value of truth, goodness, which aims at the value of human love or happiness, and will, which aims at the value of

freedom" (8), then human freedom itself is also dependent in great measure on our freedom to dialogue individually and collectively. This brings us back to the recent legal and institutional curtailment and strangling of the First Amendment freedom of assembly.

While Mitias promotes negotiation instead of war when dealing with cultural and religious conflict, he makes clear that negotiation is not dialogue. In his view, negotiation is more of a compromise, a give-and-take that rarely leaves involved parties satisfied, even if a given conflict can be said to be resolved through it. As mentioned earlier, Mitias insists that the ideal of truth is co-created through dialogue, not just arbitrated. With this in mind, I think it is worth asking: What are we doing as a society when we forbid our college students' ability to co-create that reality through dialogue? If we treat human reality as a finite, wholly knowable, and static reality not to be questioned or condemned, are we not also denying the very essence of our humanity? What role should dialogicians play in the promotion and defense of our right to assemble and to converse as a collectivity? *Human Dialogue* offers a hopeful and empowering view of human rationality that invites the reader to revisit the essence of who we truly are as human beings, and it does so with depth and rigor. Moreover, to the author of this review, such a vital ontology, one with broad and current explanatory power, also invites reflection about the degree to which our most powerful social, pedagogical, legal, and political institutions value or hinder our individual and collective (even mass) ability to dialogue in these troubled times.

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## Response to Review of *Human Dialogue*

Michael H. Mitias

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I shall begin my response with two acknowledgments. First, I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Annette Holba for inviting me to examine the present review of my book, *Human Dialogue*, and respond to it with the freedom to write a short or long rejoinder to the reviewer. This invitation is a notable feature of the dialogical nature of philosophy, which characterizes the growth and development of Hellenic, Hellenistic, medieval, and modern philosophy. It is, moreover, a vibrant expression of the dialogical nature of our humanity. It accentuates the fact that the truth of the meaning of existence in general, and human existence in particular, is attainable through dialogue. As far as I am aware, no major philosopher, since the rise of philosophy as a type of inquiry in the hands of the pre-Socratics, has contemplated the nature of the universe and human life independently of the insights, visions, and ideas of contemporary and past philosophers. The great achievements of human civilization have always been precious fruits of dialogue, not only between inquirers within the same academic discipline but also between inquirers in different academic disciplines. The various types of knowledge are interrelated because the reality they seek to understand or explain is organically interconnected.

Surprisingly, yet admirably, the expansion in breadth and depth of human knowledge during the past few decades has tended to make dialogue between the various types of inquiries, even within the same type, difficult and sometimes impossible. We can observe this development in the realm of philosophy, whose branches and sub-branches have proliferated in terms of quality and quantity. A large number of philosophers these days conduct their inquiries with minimal dialogical cooperation with other philosophers and philosophical points of view. One frequently encounters long bibliographies or notes at the end of a philosophical piece without a serious or clear indication of dialogue with other philosophical works or philosophers. I tend to think that philosophy comes to life as a living moment of insight, understanding, revelation, or inspiration in the context of dialogue. My gratitude to Professor Holba originates from my appreciation for her effort to create a dialogical *moment par excellence* with the author of the present review. It is a moment in which we stand before and with each other in the light of human presence.

Second, I would like to convey my gratitude to the reviewer of *Human Dialogue*. It is deeply gratifying to learn that one's philosophical achievement is analytically and thoughtfully evaluated. This is an instantiation of "rational conversation." Can we either ignore or underestimate the value of this interchange as a paradigmatic occasion not only for this but also for the possibility of a meaningful human encounter, one that not only cheers the heart but also inspires the mind to grow in understanding and appreciation of the human good? Vélez Ortiz has comprehended and articulated the essential features of my conception of human dialogue. She accomplished this task with a knowledge of the metaphysical and historical assumptions that underlie the background of the argument in this book. I value this orientation, especially in the current period of the development of human culture, because the more our life increases in complexity—a feature that seems obvious to any investigator of the development of human history—the less scholars and ordinary people have time to immerse themselves adequately in the fine accomplishments of the human spirit in the various domains of human experience.

My response to the review of *Human Dialogue* consists of one extended comment only because Vélez Ortiz did not raise objections to my argument. She spotlighted the need to explore the application of my conception of human dialogue to a most pressing problem we face in our democracy and the various democracies of the world, viz., the tendency of the government to suppress the possibility of peaceful demonstration or riot as a form of rational conversation in our attempt to solve problems or resolve controversies. Is social protest, or riot, a form of rational conversation? Does the government have a right, one founded in the constitution, to suppress the right to free expression of opinion or to place certain contentious questions at the table of public debate, i.e., rational conversation?

If I am to take the fundamental insight into the democratic ideal, spirit, and practice of pioneers such as Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Mill, and Dewey into serious consideration, and I do, I can say that public protest and public riots are, when necessary, forms of rational conversation. I say "when necessary" because, following Hegel, all political, social, or religious change should be accomplished legally. I here assume that law is the highest expression of rational nature and because it is grounded in the constitution. I shall now explicate my response to Vélez Ortiz's review. This explication consists of two parts. The first is a brief discussion of the metaphysical assumptions that underlie the possibility of human dialogue, and the second is a discussion of the dynamics of political conversation. The first part is an implicit support of the validity of my response.

## Assumptions

If we grant that rational conversation is the essence of human nature, it follows that in all its modes of being, the basis of human communication between human beings individually and collectively is dialogue, mainly because the language human beings speak and the means of realizing their aims and projects is the

language of reason. If this distinctive feature of human nature prevails in human life, there will not be any violence. Rational behavior is essentially peaceful. But not surprisingly, human nature in general and the power of intellect in its capacity as a cognitive and evaluative faculty is given to the world not as a ready-made reality or as perfect in the way it exists but as a potentiality for realization in experience according to the ideal implicit in its structure.

As the highest manifestation of human nature, the human mind, or reason, can, to a reasonable extent, envision or discern the logic and dynamics of the primary impulses that point to aims or values inherent in the core or spark that gives rise to humanity. However, the material and spiritual conditions for the realization of these aims or values are not readily available to them. The universe, as we know it, is essentially a process—a creative advance in time. Rational nature is not an integral element of this process, though it is unique, acts according to laws implicit in its structure, and is anchored in and dependent on its continually emerging conditions and possibilities. Accordingly, the growth and development of human nature is an ever-present ideal and challenge. This claim is based on the assumption that the impulse to human life is the principal impulse in human nature. It underlies the rise and development of science, art, philosophy, religion, technology, and various kinds of social organization. We necessarily speak of human growth and development because the spiritual and material conditions of human life are constantly changing.

Nature is continually changing, and so are human beings. The question that hovers over the fringe of human consciousness is how we can grow and develop in the midst of this continual change. The laws of nature govern the existence and life of natural objects, but the existence and life of human beings are, to a large extent, governed by the laws that emanate from the dynamic structure of human nature. However, this nature is, as I have just indicated, given as a potentiality in need of realization in an imperfect human and natural environment. The givenness of this reality is the source of all types of conflict between human beings. Since the laws of nature do not directly govern human life, the question necessarily arises: How should human beings settle their conflicts, disagreements, and misunderstandings, given the fact that human beings are different from each other intellectually, affectionally, and volitionally? It would seem that reason is, or should be, the most appropriate means of meeting these and similar types of problems mainly because it is their essential nature. It is the power and the source of the light they indispensably need to meet their needs as human beings. If reason can be the source of their understanding of themselves and pursuing their life projects, it certainly can be the means of solving their problems and meeting their needs rationally. Resorting to any other kind of means in situations of conflict, misunderstanding, or discontent will necessarily lead to violence and harm. In principle, acting contrary to the principles of reason is tantamount to acting contrary to the laws inherent in human nature. It implies existing in a state of self-contradiction or self-diremption.

The rise and development of human civilization testify to the primacy and creative powers of reason. However, this development has never been and will never be clear, smooth, or perfect because members of the human species, which

exist as potentialities in need of realization, live under various geographical, cultural, religious, material, and spiritual conditions. Accordingly, the prevalence of the power of reason is necessarily variable. It is not always the power that governs their lives; on the contrary, the impulse to personal and communal survival prevails. We may attribute the causes of this to ignorance; to lack of moral, intellectual, social, artistic, and religious education; or to the overwhelming power of biological survival. In this context, we should recall Socrates' dictum that ignorance is the source of all evil. The wisdom implied in this dictum is that the source of the power underlying the emergence of the European Renaissance and the mosaic of different Renaissance movements worldwide during the past few centuries attests to the creative and constructive power of reason. One may reflect with wonder about the miraculous aspect of this power. If we assume a moral or metaphysical attitude, we can say that the gradual triumph of reason in history is founded on the inherent goodness of reason: human nature is intrinsically good. Why should the scientist, theologian, philosopher, technologist, artist, and enlightened citizen—the forces that propel history forward—continue their endeavors despite human adversities and failures if the essence of those endeavors is not fundamentally good and constructive? How can cosmologists, philosophers, scientists, and artists strive to create, and how can social reformers strive to improve human conditions, if reason is not a power of goodness? Is this power, or the language it speaks, not the language that has underpinned the progress of history over the past four millennia?

## **Discussion**

There is no need for me to belabor the gist of the preceding introductory remark. Suffice it to say that the only effective language we speak in our endeavor to grow and develop as human beings is the language of reason—the power by which we should conceive and seek to realize our life projects individually and communally. The language that undermines human wellbeing and progress is the language of violence in its political, religious, social, institutional, and individual forms, that is, selfishness, greed, prejudice, bigotry, lust for power, and naïve hedonism. I believe that the language spoken by various individuals and communities worldwide in their endeavor to flourish should be the language of reason, namely, dialogue. The means of learning and using this language is the cultivation of human character.

Accordingly, dialogue should be the means of resolving conflicts, interacting socially, and meeting our needs as individuals, groups, families, and institutions such as governments, religions, cultures, and any type of human association. In a world plagued by ignorance, poverty, selfishness, and crude survival, the rational impulse in human nature cannot help but wonder: under what constructive conditions is dialogue as the primary means of human communication throughout the world possible? How can we translate the logic and skill of rational conversation among people who differ in their individual, cultural, religious, political, economic, and social orientations into an effective

means of rational conversation? Philosophers have been exploring the extent, implications, feasible ways, and existential conditions under which this translation is possible. It is important to emphasize that rational conversation is lacking not only in the political domain of human life but also in the spheres of family, school, workplace, and religious institutions—in short, in every medium of human interaction. How can human beings transcend their subjectivities and interact with others rationally from the standpoint of their shared humanity?

The question of how the language of reason can be translated into a way of productive communication in all spheres of human life was perceptively and rightly spotlighted in Vélez Ortiz's review of *Human Dialogue*. She introduced into the realm of political and philosophical discourse a neglected yet important mode of rational conversation at the social and political level of communication, namely, whether political or social protest, or riot, can be a form of rational conversation. This question is not entirely theoretical or whimsical; it brings into relief one of the most important conditions necessary for the possibility of democracy as a way of life. It arises from the bosom of the democratic process as it unfolds in the ongoing process of the development of democracy in the contemporary world. It springs as a response to the tendency to suppress the right to peaceful demonstration, which is essential to the very being of democracy, along with the right to freedom of speech and belief. In her words, "As legacy media frets over the fascist future that awaits the nation with the likely re-election of Donald Trump in November, the Biden administration, the Supreme U.S. Court, and college campuses all over the nation continue to strangle the right to protest inside and outside college campuses all over the nation." This type of strangulation is a suppression of the voice of reason and the need for rational conversation. One cannot help but recall, as Vélez Ortiz did, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s argument that a riot is the language of the unheard: "If Dr. King is right, and a riot is the language of the unheard, then it stands to reason that a protest, and even a riot, are, in fact, a grave lack of listening, mutual understanding, and acknowledgment in the social conversation."

A public protest is an audible language, and so is a riot. The first is voiced directly, and the second indirectly. The first is communicated verbally and peacefully, and the second is communicated behaviorally as a form of praxis. The first is a peaceful and collective request for the restoration of a justifiable right, and the second is an aggressive demand for the restoration of a neglected or suppressed right. However, both originate from a situation in which the voice of reason is silenced. Although they are different types of conversation, both are morally justifiable. We should always remember that a law, principle, or any standard of action is justifiable on moral grounds. Thus, a peaceful demonstration or a riot is *justifiable inasmuch* as they are founded on a rational principle or moral concern. I say "inasmuch as" because not all riots or public demonstrations are morally or rationally justifiable. Sometimes, they are organized by manipulative powers that may serve selfish ideologies or the interests of politically motivated or ambitious individuals or groups. In order to be justifiable, the riot or peaceful demonstration should be justified by rational means. I say "rational" because they are peremptory demands of the human essence. Besides, in its capacity as intellect,

reason is the source and judge of the truth of any type of knowledge not only because it is essentially cognitive but also because it is capable of transcendence; it can act autonomously and objectively. The obvious alternative to reason is force. However, the application of force that is not justified by a rational or moral principle is either arbitrary or a form of violence. It is at least indifferent to human wellbeing.

Now, reason does not exist abstractly, generally, or in some metaphysical space but concretely in human beings. If it speaks, and it does, it speaks through the lips of a particular human individual. What it says originates from the heart and mind. Accordingly, it expresses individual feelings, ideas, values, and desires. The question that calls for an answer is, how, or in what sense, can a crowd or a conglomeration of unique and independent individuals speak with one voice—the voice of reason? My immediate answer to this question is that they can speak and act as a collective subject. The basis of this kind of subject is their belief in or commitment to a set of morally justifiable rights or demands. In a demonstration or a riot, they stand on the grounds of such rights or demands. The voice with which they speak issues from this ground. The fundamental assumption that underlies the possibility of a crowd as a collective subject is the unity of their humanity and the beliefs or values they uphold. Even when one person speaks on behalf of the crowd, she acts as a collective subject because her speech is an expression of the general will of the crowd as a community united by specific demands, concerns, or ideas. Does the president, king, prime minister of a country, or the highest official of any institution not act as a collective subject in her capacity as an executive or representative of her country or institution?

Whether in the form of a peaceful demonstration or a riot, the members of the crowd act as a collective subject. A riot differs from a peaceful demonstration in that it is a loud, decisive, and hopelessly neglected right. This type of expression is justified by the fact that (1) it arises from a demand of our humanity and (2) the conditions of its communication are necessary.