

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

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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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