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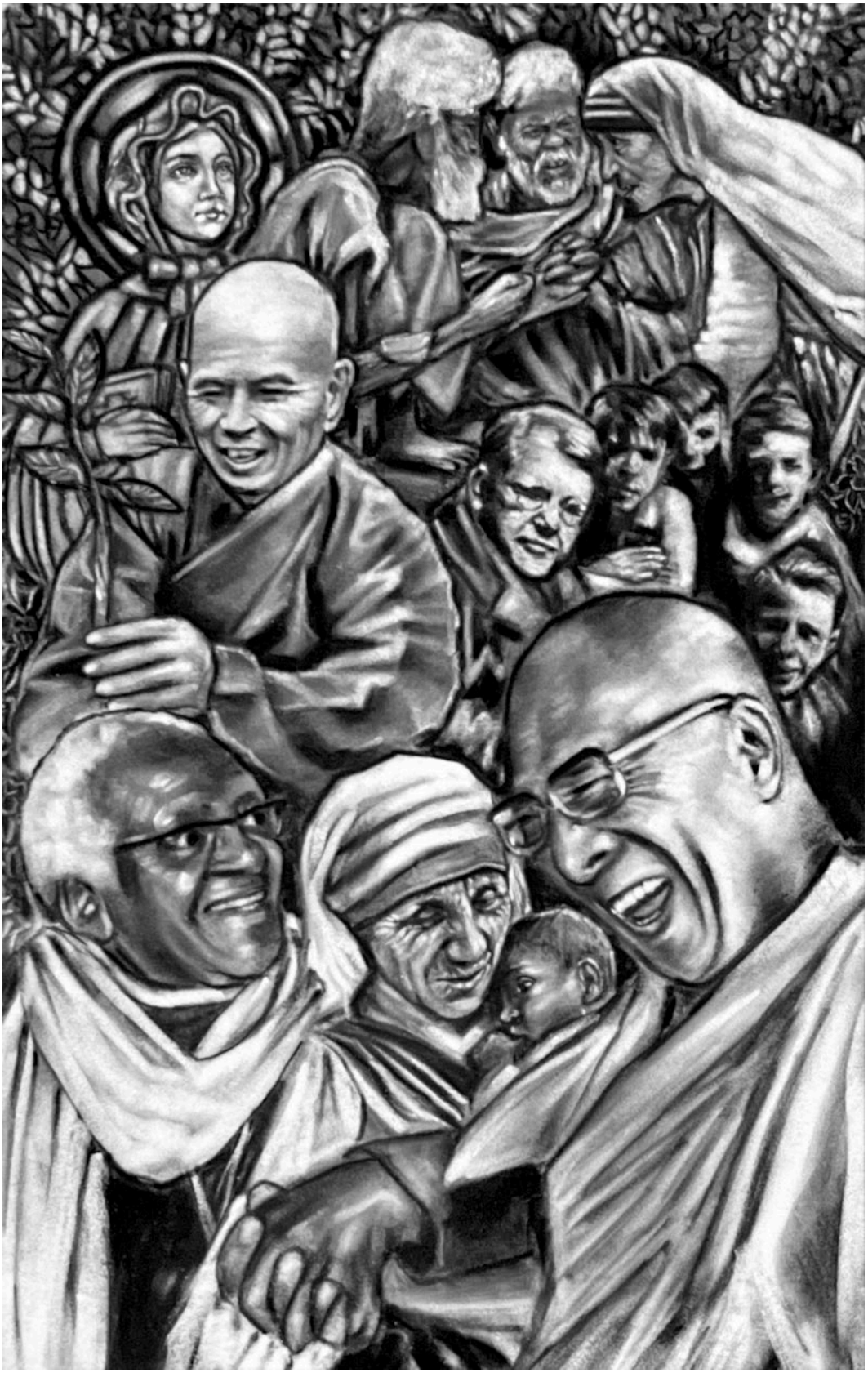

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The Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives is an open-access journal that publishes two issues per year containing original articles that advance theory and research about communication ethics implications between and among religious traditions and interhuman perspectives. The journal publishes a combination of invited and peer-reviewed submissions. Manuscripts submitted to the *Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives* should be original material not under consideration for another journal or publication. At the editor's discretion, each submission will undergo masked peer review by two members of the editorial board. Suggestions for revision will keep issues of argument, style, and contribution to the areas of communication ethics and interfaith/interhuman dialogue in mind. The editor makes final publication decisions.

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Editorial Introduction

Dialogical Ecologies

Annette M. Holba

This issue of *The Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives* explores hermeneutical themes of intergroup engagement involving moral interaction through teams and microcultures where dialogue brings together communities of perspectives within contexts of interpersonal discourse and action. The dialogical ecologies in this issue include dimensions of organizational, interpersonal, social, religious, and literary contexts to explore the moral and ethical aspects of dialogue in both implicit and explicit sentimentality. In many ways, this issue points toward dialogical ecologies that acknowledge the significance of communication and relationships and their role in creating connections within and to the environment in a broad sense. This role often involves participatory dialogue between humans and between humans and nonhumans. Because of the participatory nature and potential for impact on others, ethical elements are always involved in these engagements. Some scholars provide a more specific framework for dialogical ecology, such as Hune Margulies, founder of the Martin Buber Institute for Dialogical Ecology (https://martinbuberinstitute.dialogicalecology.org/).

Opening the discussion for this collection of scholarship is Saitya Brata Das with an essay entitled "The Mystery of Dialogue." In this passionate inquiry into the nature of dialogue, Das interrogates the question, "What does it mean to exist?" The pursuit of this fundamental question opens toward a hermeneutic mystery and an ethical attentiveness that can serve as a guide on one's interior dialogic pathway. Following Das's opening, François Cooren's essay, "Rethinking the Value-Ladenness of Interaction and Dialogue: A Ventriloquial Exploration," invites us to reconsider how we understand the interiority of interaction and dialogue. Especially in today's environment of artificial intelligence, the questions that Cooren explores are timely and necessary. Together, Das and Cooren provide a philosophical and theoretical backdrop for the subsequent essays that are situated within specific environments and applications.

Questions of ethics play a large role through advancements that artificial intelligence will bring to how we understand and engage dialogue. Similarly, in

the next essay, Fr. Dominic Maximilian Ofori explores ethics in a specific context situated within a Catholic perspective. In his essay, "Ethics of Interreligious Dialogue: A Catholic Perspective," Ofori explores interreligious dialogue in the Catholic Church as a journey of love that encounters difficult questions and truths situated within its ethical relations with other religions. Similarly, the next essay explores ethics in a different specific context. The essay is a team-written essay that is a self-study of the team members involving their lived experience of being part of a virtual team in the context of dialogue, ethics, and sustaining interprofessional relationships. In this essay, "Ethical Credo for Virtual Teams: A Case Study of a Long-Term Virtual Team," Lori J. N. Charron, Michelle Leavitt, Tammy Swenson-Lepper, Leeanne M. Bell McManus, Melba Vélez Ortiz, Robert L. Ballard, Spoma Jovanovic, and Annette M. Holba consider the role of ethical communication in the sustainability of professional relationships that balance professional goals with interpersonal care for others on the team. This is a team self-study that provides examples and a telos based on care that builds long-lasting working partnerships. Charron and colleagues explore how teams use dialogue and ethics to sustain their communicative action and personal-professional commitments.

Continuing in the environment of higher education and focusing on professionalism of the praxis of research scholarship, Bettina Stumm's essay, "Textual Dialogue and the Complexities of Ethical Relationality in the Praxis of Research Scholarship," considers how one relates and communicates to other scholars in an ethical way, leading to mutually beneficial interactions that support and promote the common good. These interactions move beyond an impersonal professional realm into building relational ties between scholars. Following the consideration of small group teams and a look at the community of research scholars in higher education, Urszula Okulska explores how one manages homelessness through dialogic action. In her study, "Communication Ethics in Homelessness: A Dialogic Analysis of Professional Encounters with People in the Homelessness Crisis," Okulska examines communication ethics in the environments of homelessness through a dialogic analysis of professional encounters with people experiencing homelessness crises. This study emphasizes the importance of face-to-face dialogue and reveals evidence for the possibility of bidirectional transformations.

Finally, in the last essay, Gavin Hurley explores Catholic horror fiction and dialectical discourse in an interesting and compelling discussion of dialogic gravitas. Hurley's essay, "Dialogic *Gravitas*: Catholic Horror Fiction and Dialectical Discourse," examines how fictional dialogues can build dialectical habits of mind for its readers. Specifically, within the Catholic horror literary subgenre, building constructive and effective dialectical habits of mind can inform, shape, and forge a serious attitude toward and curiosity for philosophical and theological discourses. Hurley traces how dialogue evokes a sentiment of gravitas through this particular genre and substance.

These essays appear radically different from each other; however, their basic focus shares a desire to improve understanding of dialogical and ethical perspectives situated within difference, within different cultural environments, and through a broad range of communicative contexts, from organizational to

interpersonal and intrapersonal. Each of these essays provides a viewpoint into the mystery of dialogue and how human-to-human engagement informs, shapes, and counters the mysteries within diverse dialogic ecologies. This issue is devoted to thinking more deeply about the nature of dialogue and how we come to understand living in the world with others.

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The Mystery of Dialogue

Saitya Brata Das

Abstract: What does it mean to exist? This fundamental question can only be understood properly if one takes "to exist" in the infinitude of its verbal resonance: that existence is essentially an event, a happening, which means that existence cannot be understood as a presently available entity which can be categorically grasped as object of our cognition. This releasing of our existence from our conceptual-categorical mastery, this redemption from the violence of cognition, has something essentially dialogic about it which cannot be reduced to the dialectical logic of position and of opposition (op-position). This ethical dimension of existence, in its essentially dialogical depth and fecundity, is the very mystery of being, that is: to be, to exist, is to confront the mystery that makes our life open to the arrival of the other which cannot be anticipated by any calculable, instrumental reason.

Keywords: dialogue; communication; language; nexus; event

For Harjeet Singh Gill

Ecstasy

"What does it mean to exist?" It is this question that interests us here.

To exist: one cannot here miss the infinitude ("to") of its verbal resonance ("exist"). To exist is irreducible to being an entity that has already been in its "what it is," to that which has come to a point of arrest, and which, as such, can now be grasped (the German verb for grasping—*greifen*—is telling) in the concept (*Begriff*—from the verb *greifen*) categorically, the concept that would subsume the phenomenon under its universality with its "maximizing thrust" (Schürmann 2003) of predicative language. The cognitive violence in its "maximizing thrust" lies in its denial of the *eventive* trait of the phenomenon in question, of its *happening* and its *perhaps*, of its *arrival* and its *ecstasy*. This is why Martin Heidegger understands *existence* ecstatically: that existence is essentially—and this is the "essence" of existence—ecstatic; and he distinguishes this ecstasy of existence from the entities *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*, entities that are presently available and ready to be used.

This brings him very close to the later Schelling; and Heidegger never fails to mention his indebtedness to Schelling (Heidegger 1985), though he basically engages with the early Schelling: that existence—reason itself—"is" (rather, "goes") ecstatic when it confronts the un-pre-thinkable (*Die Unvordenkliche*) and exuberant event of that which goes even beyond Being (*Überseynde*). This ecstasy of existence is *manifestative* and *revelatory* (*Die Offenbarung)*; and its *singular* and *eventive* trait is irreducible to the categorical grasp of the entities "the already-having-been." For the concept only represents only the "not-not" (Schelling 1994) of essence—that is, the infinite ability-to-be of being; what the concept grasps is only the immanent content of being in its infinite ability-to-be (*Seinkönnen*)—the potentiality which has its own ability to unfold itself immanently—while the *actuality*, which really is *existence* in its "essence," is that which ecstatically steps beyond and outside, because it is free for its existence. This freedom is not opposed but is at one with its necessity (see Schelling 2020). When Schelling goes on to understand God Himself in this light—*who* is *deo nil potentiale* (and hence is irreducible to any "what" and the "why") and hence is the living God—this God is free to the extent that it may even freely dispose His own being (Schelling 2020, 137). That is to say: He may, out of his own freedom and de-cision *kenotically* (following Philippians 2:6–9) *empty* Himself (following Luther's *theologia crucis* of *Entäusserung*). God is He *who* (*who* is not irreducible to "what")—and He is the actually existing and living God—freely, out of the incomprehensible de-cision (*Ent-Scheidung*), lets the extra-divine Logos be, lets the world be, lets His own "outside" be. This God is essentially *dialogic* God: He addresses the other as "thou"; He lets Himself be addressed as "thou"—in a love, even though this fiery love assumes sometimes, out of this abyss of love itself, the fury of wrath. That His fire of wrath is basically grounded in His even more originary and immemorial Love—what Schelling would call groundless (*Abgrund*)—which *groundlessly* precedes all negation and position (see Schelling 1992): this all-consuming and all purifying fiery Love which gives us life—this sourcive fire—is the very *freedom* that lets the other come into being, with whom then a *dialogue* happens, whom He *addresses* as "thou" and who *responds* to Him with a "thou," for dialogue is basically a *call* and *response* which do not necessarily have to be contemporary and coterminous with each other.

It is not necessary that dialogue has to be grounded on the synchrony of self-presence. Genuine dialogue is irreducible to the pathos of fusion which would neutralise or even nullify the singularity of the other in advance. If dialogue is genuinely to happen in freedom, then the fusion cannot but be an obstacle to dialogue: dialogue soon turns into the coercive and oppressive language of the law where every speech is transformed into "position" or an "opposition" (which is the counter-position). True dialogue interrupts the mythic return of the dialectical law of position and opposition. Dialectic is not more than dialogue. The surplus of dialogue over the logic of position: this is the unthought which remains the task of thinking.

Eventality

In fact, between the divine call and the human response—this *dia-legein* (not only in the sense of just two speeches or voices, but in the sense where two voices go *dia* without coming to a *sync*)—there is a non-contemporeinty and diachrony: the *diachrony* of freedom, the *freedom* for diachrony, is the very *Abgrund* of a divine Love, preceding all ground, which ecstatically lives outside the mythic-blind necessity. Only God who is ecstatic is the dialogic God. Only a dialogic God is the God of revelation and is Love Himself, is Truth Himself, is Life Himself (John 14:6). That the response to the question concerning truth and of life is transferred from a "what" ("*What* is truth?" "*What* is life?") to *who* ("I am the Truth," "I am the Life," "I am the Way"): this remarkable transformation or *metamorphosis* lays at rest all cognitive-conceptual attempts to grasp God in terms of immanent categories of the infinite-ability-to-be. Jesus, speaking here in the first person singular ("I"), addressing "thou," is this dialogic God. He is the God who—in order to speak to us humans amongst whom He lives as one of us—in order to enter into dialogue with us, freely and without necessity, vicariously and out of His abyss of Love, *empties* Himself even unto the cross (Philippians 2:6–9). He is the *speaking* God—the God who *speaks*, whose essential "being" is that of *speaking* to us, often in parables—who, for the sake of an infinite dialogue which transforms us even unto glory, through the humiliation on the cross, vicariously assumes the burden of the cross in order to make it light for us. To speak is to pass through the cross. God himself has to pass through the cross in order to speak: but this necessity is grounded in His freedom. The infinite speech of God passes through the measure of finitude, because He is essentially free for this finitude: this paradox of the divine language itself a cross—for understanding, for human, all-too-human reason.

This speaking and dialoguing God—who refuses Himself to be enclosed into the monologue of the mute being—is, as such, essentially God who becomes history and historical: He enters into history—the suspending and interrupting Word that He is—in order to interrupt and suspend the mythic law of necessity, in order to transform and transfigure it from the logic of all " already-having-been" into that which has not *yet* been, that which has never been at all, the world which is "to come" in essential sense. Speech transforms the ones whom the Word speaks—us, whom the Word addresses. Dialogue transfigures the one who responds to the call of Love. The Word of God is such that it interrupts the immanence of all words that are being spoken and transforms all words into their very futurity, into their very *adventitiousness*, into their very *eventality*. In speaking in human language, the Word of God *frees* all words of humans *from* their enclosures into the laws of the world *to* the open space of freedom—where a radically new world, radically different from the form of the world as it exists, would come to pass. What is *to* come would never simply pass by. The world is redeemed by the Word of the dialogic God—redeemed from the iron law of "already-having-been," from the potentiality of its mere ability-to-be—and this God places the world in the open *spacing* of freedom. This is the meaning of

redemption that issues from the dialogic Word of Him who takes His own being at risk. To speak is the essential risk which He assumes; and He is free to assume that risk to the point of the Cross, which is abominable to the *sagacity* of the world and scandalous to the *law* of the world. The Cross thus manifests this fundamental risk at its extreme moment—a *scandal* and a *folly*. This is God's *eventality* enters into history in order to bring it to the point of its passing of its existing form. God's eventality is the moment of letting go and emptying Himself on the cross, and opening up of the world to the Kingdom of which humans know neither a date nor its place. It cannot be predicted and predicated, because it is not an already-has- been, and its analogy is nowhere to be found in the world of already having-been. It is only a matter of hope which exceeds all prediction and predication: this is why Saint Paul calls this hope as the "hope against hope" (Romans 4:18), which is actually true hope, and is thus hope against all hopelessness. Only such hope saves the world which is irresistibly moving towards its own annihilation. God has to become a fool in order to confound the wisdom of the world; the Word of God has to become a scandal in order to undo the law of the world: but this is God's free necessity; it is the necessity of His freedom.

The Word of God comes out of the abyss of Love and enters into history, tears apart that history to the hope against all hope, and to which He calls us to be faithful, testing this faith against the measure of the world's intelligibility. The human intelligibility that takes its measure from the horizon of the world does not change that world: such is the world that remains unredeemed and unredeemable. Only that faith which takes its light—both lighter than the light of the world and darker than the darkness of the world—from a source beyond the horizon of the world's intelligibility, only such faith is faithful to the *eventality* of the *world to come*. The infinitude of the verbal—"to come"—is the very infinity that the speech of God, by addressing us as "thou," to whom we may call as "thou," opens us from the very heart of the world, extending and expanding that heart, deepening that heart, through which the sorrows of the world get transformed into joy, "in the little while, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). "In the little while, in the twinkling of an eye," (I Cronthians 15:51-52) " God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Revelation 21:4): this *metamorphosis* of the world is the very *gift* of a dialogue, is the *dialogic* gift par excellence, for without dialogue there is no metamorphosis, no transformation of us and of the world. It is the *evental* gift of the God who speaks to us and who lets Himself be spoken to us. He gives us the gift of speech so that we may speak to Him. The language of this speech is essentially vocative—it is prayer. It is in prayer that we find the highest vocation and innermost essence of language fulfilled. In the folding of the hands in prayer the violence of grasping and seizing of our hands is renounced and abandoned. The mournfulness of this renunciation is its very bliss—language in its fulfilment. Dialogue is essentially oriented towards to this beatitude. Dialogue is fulfilled in being thus beatified.

Dialogue

Dialogue is, then, an event of language. Dialogue *happens*. It cannot be part of a calculable program oriented towards a predetermined *telos.* The event of dialogue is the event which happens in language, but it does not wholly belong to language: that is why there is something like the *ineffable* to which language exposes us, from which language erupts as an event. This ineffability is not just an accident, a consequence, a result of speech: it is the originary and immemorial opening of speech. It is the *ecstasy* of language which, beyond all predicative and predictive structure of denomination and positing, exposes us to the *manifestative* dimension of existence by *indicating* us towards it.

The Word of God addressing us is *the event of language* par excellence: its *happening* interrupts the totality of signification that constitutes the horizon of the world's intelligibility. But this fundamental *interruption* does not annihilate the world in a divine fury of utter destruction; rather, this interruption saves and salvages the world *to* its "to come," for *redemption*. There is thus no true dialogue without at once interrupting the totality of the already accomplished signification, and there is no true interruption without fundamentally salvaging the fundamentally *manifestative* trait of our existence. Dialogue interrupts and tears apart—in the redemptive violence of love—the closure of the monologue in which the world tends to enclose itself in the mythic law of necessity. God, whenever He speaks, interrupts the myth of the world. The narcissism of the world, blind to love, deaf to the call of love, dumb to receive the risk of love, tends to close itself into the "already-having-been" of being; the speech of love, demanding from us a response, ineluctably always late, wakes us up by shattering the foundation of this narcissistic world. Dialogue is thus not an apologetic use of language that exhausts itself in the sweet harmony of signification; rather, dialogue shatters the foundation of what has already been and of what has congealed itself into the sterile attributes of the law's immobility. As against the stagnancy of the world's law, love affirms itself in an un-re-thinkable and exuberant overflowing renewal—in a speech that is the surplus of signification, in the manifestative indication which exceeds all attribution. Dialogue is, then, the fundamental speech act of God and the speech act between humans. *It is love's act.* Even though this love appears fragile, its fragility exceeds all the powers of the world and all potentiality of an infinite ability-to-be. This is why Schelling, contra the dominant ontological understanding of being, understands actuality to be more than potentiality: God is He—He is the speaking God—whose actuality is such an exuberant fire that all potentiality of the world is consummated in its purifying flame of redemption.

The gift of language, which is never an aboriginal to the supposedly autarchic human, is the very gift of addressing and being addressed as "thou"; it is the very gift of addressing the "thou" as "I." This is why both Meister Eckhart and Schelling understand existence itself as "gift" or even as "loan" (Schelling 1992), freely given, gratuitously arrived. Language discloses, manifests, reveals me to myself as the "I" who essentially responds: henceforth all the address that issues from me as *call* issues from this originary *response* to the divine call of love. My

responsibility lies in this *response*—in this response to the call which comes to me from Love, which comes to me from Him who is Love. Without this fundamental *listening* there is no dialogue. I cannot enter into dialogue with the "thou" without listening. To listen is to learn to wait. In waiting time flourishes and blossoms wherein the human being perdures and endures. To listen, even to be able to speak, is to cease myself speaking for the time being. This interaction between listening and speaking is the very mystery of dialogue. It is the mystery because in listening all to which I listen is not exhausted in my conceptual-cognitive ability to comprehend. There remains something which I cannot exhaustively comprehend. There remains the ineffability that lends language its *eventiveness*, its *dis-enclosure*, its *manifestative* and its *indicative* dimension which refuses to close itself up within a totality of signification. Since we—the human beings ourselves—are speaking and dialoguing beings, the ground of our very existence remains an indecipherable mystery to us—without which there is no language. Dialogue thus marks the finitude of each one of us, and manifests, at the same time—without exhausting in signification—that which truly is the infinitude that keeps the heart of the world, our very world, open to the *coming* of *redemption*. Dialogue is, then, the heart not just of language but of the world. The world in its eventiveness—and not in its signification is essentially dialogic: it palpitates, trembles, shudders in the coming of the Other whose name is beyond all names.

Nexus

God speaks, the world comes to being. God speaks, the speaking being comes to being. There is something like a trace of divinity in human language. Now this human language not only responds to the call of the Other and calls others like him/her; s/he also calls—by that very gift of language—nature who comes to receive her names. Language, which is essentially dialogical, constitutes the very ontological nexus of beings: from God to nature, a language passes though the human whose essential being is to speak. The human is the vowel between consonants, as Schelling (1992) says. He is created in the *eikon* of God—*imago Dei*. The event of the fall marks the decisive rupture of this nexus. Now humans, and the whole of nature too, "groan" for their redemption (Romans 8:18–25)—that is, they groan for the restoration of the originary ontological nexus. Now the dialogical language is overwhelmed with the lust for mastery and domination—language is transformed into an instrument, a means to an end; the "dominion" which is the originary gift from God to humans is transformed into domination. The transmutation of the ontological nexus of beings is the very transmutation of language, due to the fall of the humans. The dialogic language suffers the violence and becomes an infinite groaning. We have been, along with nature, groaning all along. Only in the restoration of language to its originary dialogic nature lies our redemption; and it is in redemption alone, from the violence of domination, that the ethical task of all dialogic thinking and being lies.

When at the inception of the self-legitimizing epoch of modernity the human being is determined as an autarchic and self-sufficient Subject of

rationality, the doctrine of the originary nexus of being is obfuscated and has undergone oblivion. The human language came to be determined in its task as that of clarifying of what has-already-been: a certain concept of "truth" is born which consists of testing this clarifying act of human rationality in terms of its propositional structure, where the dialogic-evental-ecstatic-manifestative trait of language is set aside in order to legitimize the ontic sciences. The drafting of human existence—and the whole of nature too—into this totalizing project of the kingdom of man, demands drafting of human language too within this totalizing project: the vocative nature of language is reduced to the juridical language of means to an end, because the juridical language of means and end—with its "maximizing thrust"(Schürmann 2003) —can assimilate and appropriate the multiple singularities of phenomena under the gaze of the one. The verbality of the infinitive—in its radical openness to the futurity—gets transfixed into the "small stations" and "crabbed times" (Rosenzweig 2005, 354) of the substantives, closed up into the stagnant waters of the asphyxiating law.

At the closure of this epochal condition it constitutes the highest vocation of human existence to be itself vocative; and it is language, which is in its essence vocative—that is, in its mystery of the dialogic nature—which can unfold humanity to its essential truth: that the human being is an essentially open being, to the divine and to nature amidst which s/he exists ecstatically, as the being whose task consists in that s/he manifests himself/herself to the other as the one who essentially responds to the call of responsibility.

The mystery of dialogue is, then, less of an objective fact among facts in the world but the name of an essential task that the human being—because s/he is made in the image of God—may hope to assume in order to participate in the redeeming and salvaging act of restitution of the originary ontological nexus of beings. It cannot be a calculable program which can be carried out, with a pre-determined *telos*, by the ratiocinative actions of the human being. Only in thoughtful listening to the call of the infinity—who Himself is Word—may this essential task fructify and flourish in us.

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Rethinking the Value-Ladenness of Interaction and Dialogue: A Ventriloquial Exploration

François Cooren

Abstract: In this article, I propose to explore the value-ladenness of interaction and dialogue by conceiving of communication as an act of ventriloquation. By ventriloquation, I mean that whenever people speak to each other, or more generally express themselves, many figures can be heard as expressing themselves too. This ventriloquation, as I show, implies, by definition, a form of attachment, which can take the form of constraints and desires. Interaction and dialogue are therefore laden with values to the extent that they express these various attachments, which constitute the accountable character of what we say and do. As vectors of these values, we can therefore position ourselves in our discussions and lend weight to what we say and do.

Keywords: ventriloquism; value; dialogue; interaction; attachment

When we say that a certain definition, depiction, or terminology is "laden with values," we usually mean that it is far from being neutral and that it implicitly expresses ideologies, biases or prejudices, which are folded, so to speak, in what is being said. But if we can metaphorically speak about something as being laden with values, it means, by definition, that these values are *lending their weight* to what is being said or, more generally, communicated. So, what does "lending weight" mean when we speak about values in the context of a discussion or dialogue? Of course, one could be tempted to respond that this is just a metaphorical expression and that values, as abstract figures, don't really have any weight. By using this formulation, we just convey the idea that they implicitly express themselves in what is being said, written, or more generally done, whether this expression is recognized or not by the interlocutors or readers. This is, after all, just an image! Another interpretation would, however, consist of noting that even if a metaphor always has its limits, this vehicle, as we call it (Richards 1936), is also supposed to convey its part of truth about the tenor it claims to describe. This would be the interpretation defended by a ventriloquial perspective (Cooren 2010, 2012, 2020b).

According to this way of conceiving of interaction and dialogue, expressing a value consists of *making it say* something that goes along the same line as what we are saying, an interpretation that would then explain why the idea of *weight* makes sense. Values lend their weight to what we are saying because we end up not being the only ones saying what we are putting forward. By positioning ourselves as vectors of values (Brummans et al. 2021), we give them a way to express themselves, which means that they end up *coauthoring* our stances or positions, that is, acting as their other sources or origins, hence the weight they add to what we are saying. In this article, I will highlight the mechanisms by which the ventriloquation of values takes place in the context of two excerpts of a mediation session. In particular, I will show to what extent their ventriloquation can be said to make a difference in the way these sessions evolve.

Values

To address the question of value is certainly intimidating as this notion has been explored by countless philosophers (Harman 2000), economists (Marx 1951), psychologists (Smith 2017), sociologists (Spates 1983) and anthropologists (Graeber 2001). From the difference between intrinsic vs. extrinsic values (Rønnow-Rasmussen 2015) to the distinction between universal vs. particular values (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969), innumerable debates have explored and continue to explore their characteristics as well as the roles they play in our lives. Although my take on values could be said to be close to John Dewey's (1939) theory of valuation, I propose here to start naively from dictionary definitions as my goal is not to debate about their characteristics, but to explore the role they play in our conversations and dialogues.

So how do dictionaries define values? Oxford Languages offers the following definitions: "the regard that something is held to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of something" as well as "a person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life." As we see in these characterizations, values, and this should not surprise us, correspond, of course, to what we value or valorize, that is, what we consider to be important or significant. There is, however, a distinction that the dictionary highlights here between what we could call values in themselves, which correspond to the second definition, and the values of something or someone, which correspond to the first one.

When we typically talk about values in everyday discourse, we refer to principles, qualities or standards such as honesty, loyalty, equity, integrity, freedom, truth, health, effectiveness or generosity. These values are important as they are often presented as implicitly or explicitly *guiding* our conducts and behaviors. For instance, when we say, "This decision is terribly unfair" or "this option is not practical," we are implicitly invoking principles – respectively, equity and practicality – that are supposed to say something about a decision or option that we are now commenting or denouncing. What are these principles saying? That a decision or option is wrong, as the principles of equity and practicality

would normally *dictate* that we proceed differently. When we evaluate a situation or option, such as a decision that has been made or an option that has been chosen, we typically mobilize values that are presented as *saying something about it*.

But why can principles, qualities or standards be considered values? Because we precisely value them, that is, because we consider them to be important, significant or essential. They are supposed to play critical roles in our lives. We are therefore more or less *attached* to them. Even if they appear, at first sight, abstract, they express, and this is an important point, *qualities*, *traits* or *characteristics* that we are supposed to recognize in various things or persons in our daily lives. In other words, they are qualities, traits, or characteristics that we deem important, and it is because of this importance that we invoke them in our discussions. Interestingly, we find here the first dictionary definition that we identified earlier, that is, "the regard that something is held to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of something." It is indeed through its specific qualities, traits, or characteristics that we value something, that is, that we ascribe some importance to it.

We could at this point mobilize Peirce's (1955) phaneroscopy to the extent that qualities express what this American philosopher called *firstness*, that is, "the being of positive qualitative possibility" (75), while principles or standards express what he proposed to call thirdness, that is, "the being of law that will govern facts in the future" (75). Between these two categories, he also identified what he called secondness, which he defined as "the being of actual fact" (75). Whenever we experience values, Peirce can therefore help us identify this phenomenon—in his own vocabulary, this *phaneron*—in terms of firstness, secondness, and thirdness: We experience the quality of something or someone (firstness) through the effects this thing or person produces (secondness) because of the habits, reasons, or laws that govern their behavior (thirdness).

Applied to a decision that we deem unfair, we are therefore inferring this *quality* of unfairness (firstness) from the *effects* this decision is supposed to have, according to us, on various people (secondness), possibly because this decision was, we believe, *animated* by a lack of concern for them (thirdness). As we see here—and this is, I believe, an interesting point—values inform our evaluations and discussions not only as firstness, but also as thirdness: we recognize them as qualities (firstness), but they also express what animate our conducts and judgments (thirdness): evaluating something or someone consists of identifying in them specific traits that matter to us, which means that this mattering also guides our conducts and judgments. If unfairness is identified in a decision, it is because we don't find *in* it a specific trait: fairness, a trait that matters to us and supposedly does not matter to the people who made this decision—a lack of concern that therefore also guides our own judgement, since this value matters to us.

Given what Garfinkel (1967) would call the accountable character of what we do and say, we see that values are indeed constantly at stake in our discussions as they are supposed to inform, of course, our conducts (they guide our behavior because we are supposedly attached to them) and our judgment (they guide how we evaluate a situation). For instance, if someone cuts in line while we are waiting in a queue to be served, chances are that we will object by invoking the "first come,

first served" principle, which is itself more generally based on a principle of fairness and impartiality (Livingston 1987). In terms of *authority*, we therefore see another important aspect of values, which is that they are supposed to *authorize* or *allow* us to say what we say and do what we do. I can object to someone cutting in line because I can invoke the "first come, first served" principle, which itself *dictates* that people systematically enter a queue by the end.

In other words—and this is an important point—it is not only we who are objecting to someone butting in line, but also this rule, which we are implicitly or explicitly invoking (we therefore become its *vector*, so to speak). As Garfinkel (1967) points out, we are not judgmental dopes; that is, we are able to judge situations by ourselves, but judging situations precisely amounts to evaluating whether what matters or counts to us—a principle of fairness or equity, for instance—is respected by others. Budging in line is a conduct that, for us, does *not* display a specific trait that counts or matters to us (fairness or equity), which, at first sight, authorizes or allows us to object to this behavior. It is indeed not only we who are objecting to this conduct, but also a principle of fairness or equity that we implicitly or explicitly express through our intervention.

This example also allows us to examine another important aspect of values, which is that they are hierarchized (Fisher 1978; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969). If we are not judgmental dopes, it is indeed also because we can assess situations *on their own merit*, as we say. For instance, we could imagine a situation where someone butting in line would justify her action by invoking an emergency. This is, for example, what sometimes happens when passengers are waiting to be checked for security at the airport, as a person could indeed put forward that she is about to miss her plane. In this case, the principle of equity appears superseded by another principle, solidarity, which dictates that this person be allowed, in this specific case, to break the line. One could also claim that the principle of equity is still active here, as it could be said that we would hope to be treated in the same way, should we be in the same situation as this person. In other words, it seems fair that this person be allowed to butt in line in this specific case, given the circumstances.

Dialogue and interaction are therefore value-laden because whenever we conduct or express ourselves, we do things that are, by definition, going to be valued or evaluated. These values are supposed to guide what we say or what we do (hence their thirdness), but they are also what is supposed to be expressed and recognized in what we say and what we do (hence their firstness). This explains why what we do and say is constantly judged or evaluated: *Guided by our own values, we constantly evaluate others' values*. Between the general character of these two modes of being (thirdness and firstness), we find the particular character of action (secondness), which is both guided by and therefore expressing values. We also note that values are, by definition, always *relational*, not only because we compare them with each other (for instance, solidarity vs. equity), but also because they always express a form of *attachment* (Cooren 2016; Gomart and Hennion 1999; Hennion 2007). We are more or less *attached* to them, a form of attachment that defines their hierarchy but also defines us as individuals and communities.

As abstractions, values such as honesty, loyalty, equity, integrity, freedom, truth, health, effectiveness or generosity, are, we could imagine, more or less universal. Whether we are Taiwanese, Kenyan, or Chilean, they more or less matter or count to us, and we all have a word to name each of them. What might differentiate individuals, groups, communities or nationalities from each other, though, is not only the way in which these values express themselves in what we say and do, but also the *degree* of their mattering—that is, what values matter the most in specific situations. Even if they are abstract, an abstractness that defines their firstness and thirdness, they have very concrete effects—that is, they *materialize* through our conducts and communications (secondness), which also implies that some values end up mattering or counting more than others (Bencherki et al. 2021; Brummans et al. 2020; Cooren 2020).

This idea of materialization is potentially interesting as it shows how various cultures can be concretely studied. Instead of thinking of a culture as something shared by a given speech community, we should rather think of cultures as more or less *cultivated*, that is consciously or unconsciously nurtured by a group of people (Bencherki et al. 2020a; Cooren 2010, 2012; Cooren and Sandler 2014). Even if I recognize the pleonastic nature of this definition (culture as what is cultivated), I think that it still deserves our attention to the extent that it enjoins us to identify, as analysts, what values appear to be iteratively expressed in what people say and do. Yes, for sure, these values are shared, but if they are shared, it is also because they are cultivated through their materialization in our actions and discussions.

Ventriloquation

So, the question then becomes: How can we study the value-ladenness of dialogue and interaction? In other words, how can we study values in action, so to speak? I would contend that we need a methodology that allows us to identify concretely how values manage to express themselves in and through what we say and do. This methodology therefore needs to acknowledge that we are not the only ones who are saying things when we speak, but that there are other things that do so too, in particular values. If these values can lend their weight to what we say, it is indeed because they are supposedly saying the same thing we are saying. When, for instance, we claim to speak in the name, on behalf of, or for other people, we become potentially more powerful precisely because it is not only we who are now speaking, but also other people that we present as speaking *through* us. They are therefore *lending their weight* to what we are saying (Bergeron and Cooren 2012; Cooren 2010; Matte and Cooren 2015).

The same logic applies, I would contend, to values: When we speak implicitly or explicitly in their name, that is, when we invoke, evoke or convoke them in our talk, we add their voices to ours—that is, we add, to use another metaphor, their weight to ours. What is their weight? Well, this cannot be said in advance, as this is, by definition, an empirical question. If we materialize them in our talk, it is because we believe that they might also matter to our interlocutors

(or at least to the people who are listening to us), which means that they might ultimately make a difference in the way the discussion evolves. This is what the image of weight is supposed to convey: by adding their weight to what we are saying, values might change the way people see a situation, as this weight could unbalance or unsettle what previously appeared as established or founded or, on the contrary, confirm it.

So, what could be this methodology, which would also be a theory of communication? I would contend that a ventriloquial theory of communication appears as an excellent candidate (Cooren 2010, 2012, 2020). According to this theory, any act of communication can be seen as an act of ventriloquation, that is, an act that consists of making oneself and other things or persons say things. These other things and persons can be called *figures*, as this term is sometimes used by ventriloquists to speak about the puppets that they are manipulating and animating (Goldblatt 2006). For instance, if a master of ceremonies invokes a protocol to enjoin participants to proceed in a certain way, it is not only this person, the master of ceremonies, who is talking. It is also, according to the ventriloquial thesis, the protocol that expresses itself in this situation.

What does this protocol say, according to this person? That the participants should proceed in such or such way. As we see in this example, the protocol and the master of ceremonies are therefore supposed to say the same thing, which means that the protocol *lends its weight* to what the master of ceremonies is saying. They are speaking *in unison*, so to speak, to enjoin participants to act in a specific way. As mentioned earlier, we are also dealing here with questions of authority and authoring (Bencherki et al. 2020b; Benoit-Barné and Cooren 2009; Vásquez et al. 2018). The master of ceremonies certainly is the author of what is being said, but she is, in fact, a *vector* and *coauthor*, as the origin of what is being said can also be traced back to the protocol itself and to the people who designed it.

We could even go back further and say that the person who designed this protocol was probably acting in the name of the institution to which this protocol is associated. Technically, the master of ceremonies is the author of what she is saying, but she is especially what Goffman (1981) would call an *animator*, while the real authors are the people who wrote the protocol, and the institution, the *principal*. Thinking about communication as an act of ventriloquation consists of acknowledging these effects not only of coauthorship, but also of authority. When this person speaks, it is not only Ms. Smith who is speaking. It is also, and maybe especially, a master of ceremonies, who is herself speaking on behalf of a protocol, which is itself acting in the name of the institution (Taylor and Van Every 2000, 2014).

All these figures—the master of ceremonies, the protocol, and the institution—are supposed to be saying something when Ms. Smith is speaking, which means that they each lend their weight to what is being said. There is an increase in author-ity because there is an increase in author-ing (Koschmann and Burk 2016; Wright et al. 2023). As Latour (1986) pointed out almost forty years ago, the power of what we say and do comes from the *associations* we are able to make or express (see also Latour 2005). In this specific case, this power comes from Ms. Smith's association with her status (master of ceremonies), the protocol she is

ventriloquizing, and the institution she represents. This power or authority is, of course, *relational* as it has to be recognized by her interlocutors, otherwise nothing will happen as she wishes. In other words, it is especially the other participants who have to recognize that when she speaks, it is the master of ceremonies who is expressing herself, as well as the protocol and the institution.

In Latour's (2005) parlance, she is an actor-network—that is, she is both an actor, that is, someone who is doing something (here, speaking), and she is a network to the extent that we can trace back, as participants or analysts, the other actors that or who are speaking when she speaks. She is therefore also a vector. While theories of dialogue and communication seem often stuck in the here and now of a specific event (a communicator/speaker/writer communicating/ speaking/writing to a recipient/listener/reader), conceiving communication as an act of ventriloquation amounts to freeing ourselves from this straitjacket—temporally speaking, spatially speaking, but also *actorially* speaking (if I may use this neologism). It does not mean, of course, that everything goes and that ventriloquation is a sort of "free for all" activity, but it means that communicating is not only about what the actor who is pronouncing words or writing lines is saying; it is also about *what or who is recognized as expressing itself/himself/herself through him or her*.

Importantly, whenever we ventriloquize a figure (a protocol, for instance), this figure can also be said to ventriloquize us, an oscillation or vacillation already identified by Goldblatt (2006). When the master of ceremonies invokes the protocol, one can infer, by definition, that she is animated by her attachment to it. This protocol *matters* to her, and it is because of this mattering that she is led to invoke it to enjoin us to act in a specific way. As we see in this illustration, the figures that we ventriloquize ventriloquize us in return through our attachments to them. The idea of attachment is key here, as it positions us as *puppets* ourselves. We are, to some extent, at the mercy of our attachments, these strings that relate us to what matters to us (Caronia and Cooren 2014; Poroli and Cooren 2023), transforming us in their vectors.

It is because the master of ceremonies *values* the protocol (it matters to her) that it has a chance to be invoked by her at a specific point. Interestingly, we find here again the notion of value. The protocol is not per se *a* value in the traditional sense, that is, a principle like fairness, effectiveness or justice, but it *has* a value, and it is because of this value—because it *matters* to the master of ceremonies—that it can eventually be heard in what she is saying. If we then wonder what kind of value this protocol has for the master of ceremonies, she might answer that it has, so to speak, a *value of obligation*. It is something that she is supposed to follow as a master of ceremonies. In terms of firstness, this protocol thus displays, to her, the quality of being mandatory, what could be called a form of bindingness or compulsoriness.

Whenever we study an interaction, dialogue, or discussion from a ventriloquial perspective, values can therefore be unveiled at least under two forms. First, they are values in themselves, so to speak—that is, as principles that can be recognized in what someone is saying because these values are explicitly (as in "Justice requires that we give due and equal consideration to all

individuals") or implicitly (as in "This is terribly unfair!") invoked. Second, values appear through anything that or anyone who is invoked and therefore express a form of *attachment*, whether we are talking about things as diverse as a protocol, a rule, a fact, a situation, or a person, just to name some examples. These are not values per se, but they are *valued*, and it is because of this value that they can be ventriloquized in a specific situation.

Although this attachment could be faked, what matters is that it is *expressed* through an invocation/ventriloquation. In other words, my point is not to claim that people are *really* attached to the values they implicitly or explicitly invoke in an interaction (in other words, they can certainly be hypocrites and strategic in their invocations). What I am claiming is that this attachment is always tacitly expressed when this happens, whether or not it is consciously experienced by the person who appears ventriloquized by the principles they invoke. This is why it can indeed be said that dialogue and interaction in general are value-laden. They are value-laden because they express values in themselves (principles) or because they express, more generally, everything that appears to be valued by the interlocutors. These things constitute matters of interest, preoccupation, or obligation, and it is to this extent that they materialize in our discussions.

An Illustration: Two Excerpts of a Mediation Session

The beauty of a ventriloquial approach to communication, in my opinion, is that it not only seems to make sense from a theoretical perspective but also allows us to analyze the dynamic of concrete interactions. In order to analyze the key role that values play in our conversations, I therefore propose to show how they can be unveiled from a ventriloquial perspective. To do so, I propose a brief examination of two excerpts from a mediation session that took place between a young man, fictively named Curt, and a Canadian administration about his disagreement with a decision made by this institution. Curt grew up in Canada and moved abroad for a while, where he was the victim of a serious car accident ten years before the mediation is taking place. He has since returned to Canada, disabled. He permanently walks with crutches.

Very recently, the governmental institution gave him "permanently disabled" status, which allows him to receive benefits. However, he challenges this decision, for he claims that he has been disabled for ten years and that this status should apply retroactively from the time of his return to Canada. In the fieldnotes of my PhD student, who recorded this session, it reads, "Curt is an angry young man. He is accompanied by his mother. He seems frustrated and is holding folded papers in his hand. He keeps his hat on and his mother her coat." This frustration is interesting from a ventriloquial perspective, as it shows how the value of justice appears to play, of course, a key role in this situation. What is frustration after all? It is, according to Oxford Languages, "the feeling of being upset or annoyed, especially because of inability to change or achieve something." As we will see, Curt looks and sounds indeed frustrated because, as the representative of the institution will even point out later, the situation appears indeed frustrating to him

and her: Curt has been disabled for ten years, but these ten years haven't been recognized by the institution. A form of justice would normally require that Curt be allowed to receive his benefit from the moment he returned to Canada as a disabled person, but this disablement has just been recognized ten years later.

But what is even more interesting in my opinion is how this frustration, which marks both his attachment to a fair treatment and the impossibility of getting it, appears to come into conflict, at the beginning of the session, with another attachment, that of his lawyer and the mediator to the procedure. A mediation session is supposed to work according to the following protocol: It starts by (1) the presentation of the grievances by the mediator, followed by (2) a period during which these grievances are discussed. The session is then finally punctuated by (3) a period of negotiation, which potentially leads to a resolution. Although this procedure has not been explained by the mediator at the beginning of the session, we can surmise that she is taking for granted that it has been explained by Curt's lawyer, who accompanies him.

Note that at no point does the representative of the Canadian administration intervene in the two excerpts I analyze here. She only listens to what the mediator, Curt, and his lawyer are saying, and she will only start speaking later to present how her Ministry sees the situation. Here is the first excerpt:

27	Mediator	OK (.), so, eh, you're contesting two decisions, eh?
28	Curt	((nods))
29	Mediator	We have two files. (.) One is regarding hm, hm (0.5), with the institution refused (0.2)
30		I'm with the file eh, 25###, OK?
31	Lawyer	OK
32	Mediator	The one that is, actually that the institution says that they already rendered a decision.
33		((Looks up to Curt)).
34	Curt	OK, but I DID not know that. All I know is (.) I CAME here, I was born here, I came back
35		here handicapped. When I came back here handicapped, I've been filing these papers with
36		my doctors, left and right. ((Taps fingers on papers in front of him, looking at them as he
37		speaks. The mediator is looking at him and even takes her glasses off to see him better))
38	Lawyer	((lifts her hand up, turns to him, looking at him only)) We're just gonna explain, and after
39		we're gonna ((Curt has lifted a paper he's looking at while the mediator is speaking))
40	Curt	Yeah
41	Lawyer	Explain our point of view
42	Curt	OK
43	Lawyer	OK
44	Mediator	Thank you ((puts her glasses on)). So that's one file (.) where the institution says that
45		they already rendered a decision, and uh (0.5) Sorry (1.0) ((opens a file on her right-

hand side)) I just want to leave it open. The other one, hmm, it's a, the other file, you are contesting three decisions of the institution, hmm, where they, hmm they are refusing (.) to allow you the permanent (.) disability, and instead they're giving you like ((clearing her throat)) pardon me, the temporary constraint.

Curt They were

Mediator Mm. They were. Now you have the?

Curt Yes

Mediator OK. But at the time of the decision, that's what you were contesting.

Curt Yeah, I know ((flipping through his documents with his right hand)), like, she ((pointing to his lawyer)) told me I've got to speak after, but yeah.

As we see, the mediator is doing what, according to the procedure, she is supposed to do at the beginning of the session, that is, presenting Curt's grievances. As it is usually the case, she presents her comprehension of the situation, a comprehension that she regularly asks Curt to confirm, which he does on line 28. However, on line 34, we see how Curt emphatically reacts to how the mediator continues to present her comprehension of the situation by claiming that he did not know of the decision taken by the institution until recently and then proceeds to tell his own story and what happened to him (the fact that he was born in Montreal, that he came back to this city handicapped, and that since then he has been filing papers with doctors to be recognized as such). While he says that, he is tapping his fingers on the papers that he has brought with him and that are now lying on the table. A form of exasperation or frustration can thus already be heard in his tone, facial expression, and gestures.

Ventriloquially speaking, Curt can be said to be presenting a series of facts that are supposed to show that even if this institutional decision was indeed made, he has done everything, since his accident, to get the benefits he thinks he is entitled to. In other words, the facts that he is presenting at this point (and that he obviously values) are supposed to *speak for themselves*. What do they say? That he has done what he thought he had to do to get the benefits he thinks he deserves and that he has been therefore unfairly treated by the institution. Although the term "justice," "equity," or "fairness" is not used explicitly by Curt in this turn of talk, it is this principle, and therefore this value, that can be heard as lending its weight to what he is saying at this point: He has been unfairly treated, which explains his frustration. When he speaks at this point, he is not only ventriloquizing facts that are supposed to show how unfairly he has been treated by this decision, but also a principle—namely, justice, equity, or fairness, whatever we want to call it—that is implicitly mobilized in this demonstration.

Interestingly, we see that Curt's lawyer then intervenes to point out to him indirectly that his intervention is out of order. After raising her hand and turning to him, she says, "We're just gonna explain, and after we're gonna . . . explain our point of view" (lines 38–41). Two types of "we" are staged in this intervention: the first "we" is inclusive and concerns the fact that the situation is going to be

presented by the mediator to all the participants, while the second "we" is more restrictive and refers to Curt and herself, as they will be later able to present their viewpoint on the situation. Although the procedure is not explicitly invoked in what she is saying, she is implicitly recalling for Curt what is supposed to happen procedurally. A certain tension can thus be felt here between what the procedure requires or dictates, which is implicitly put forward by Curt's lawyer at this point, and the thirst for justice that expresses itself when Curt intervenes from lines 34 to 37.

Two values thus express themselves in this situation. On one side, we can feel the weight of the procedure, which normally dictates that the mediator be allowed to present the grievances to all the participants. This procedure *is* not a value per se but *has* what I called earlier a value of *obligation* for the mediator to the extent that she is supposed to follow it at the beginning of the session. On the other side, we can feel the weight of Curt's attachment to justice, which appears to lead him to break the procedure and express his frustration while he was not supposed to do so. Everything thus happens as though he cannot help expressing this frustration, although he is supposed to know that he is not allowed to do so at this point. Two values can therefore be said to be in conflict in this situation: a thirst for justice (and all its equivalents), vectorized by Curt, on one side, and the procedure, on the other side, vectorized by the mediator.

Note that these two values—justice and the procedure—are contradicting each other not in and by themselves, but because they are respectively animating Curt and the mediator in ways that appear incompatible at this specific point. In other words, Curt's thirst for justice leads him to voice his grievances as the mediator is still following the procedure by presenting the case, a procedure that normally *requires* that the two parties listen to what the mediator is saying at this point. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that we are dealing here with a question of degrees: the procedure is indeed still something that Curt himself minimally values. As we see, he ends up complying with it not only in lines 40 and 42, when he marks his willingness to postpone the presentation of his grievances, but also in lines 54 and 55, when he explicitly says that as "[his lawyer] told me, I've got to speak after."

In phaneroscopic terms, we also see how Curt's frustration functions both as a *feeling* (firstness) that can be recognized in his *conduct* (secondness) and as what *animates* him in this situation (thirdness). Firstness, as we recall, corresponds to qualities, while thirdness corresponds to habits, reasons, or laws that govern our conducts. Curt appears frustrated (firstness), but this frustration can only be recognized if it is communicated into being (secondness), a communication that then displays how his conduct is (at least partially) governed by this frustration, which functions here as one of the reasons for his behavior (thirdness).

This frustration, as pointed out before, appears itself caused by his thirst for justice, a value that, as we presume Curt believes, has been flouted in his case. His thirst for justice is therefore itself a quality (firstness) that expresses itself through his intonation, through the fact that he is tapping on the documents he brought with him, and through his facial expressions (secondness). But if this thirst for justice can be felt in his conduct, it is also because it is what *explains* his

behavior, that is, it is what governs his conduct, among other things (thirdness). Ventriloquation, as we see in this analysis, thus expresses itself through the three fundamental categories of phaneroscopy. This is expected, given that it is a theory of communication, which therefore concerns action (secondness), but also a theory that highlights what animates us (thirdness), an animation that can be recognized through the qualities, attributes, and properties (firstness) that express themselves in what we say and do.

But let's look at what happens just after:

59	Mediator	OK ((coughing)) I'm sorry hm I'm sorry actually, I- I just want to make sure (.) I- I want
60		to make sure we have the right address for you, OK? (0.5) and I'll do it now because
61		otherwise I might hm forget. Are you still at ##
62	Curt	Yes
63	Mediator	Apartment 4 and phone number ### [is good?
64	Curt	[Yes.
65	Mediator	OK, thank you, sorry about that. Hm OK, so yeah so hm, now you have the- the permanent-
66	Curt	I've been recognized exactly three years after I made my first demand.
67	Mediator	OK
68	Curt	This is why I don't understand how (0.5) they tell me "contest," I didn't contest at the
69		right time. I never had a lawyer ((Taps fingers on the papers in front of him, looking at
70		them as he speaks)). I don't know how the law works over here ((tapping his fingers
71		on his papers)). My doctor told me what to do ((tapping his fingers on his papers)), and
72		this is what I did ((tapping his fingers on his papers)). So, everything else, that is going
73		on, I have no clue what's going on, this is why I got a lawyer.
74	Mediator	Uhm uhm ((nodding))
75	Curt	In January to help me represent me, because I came here handicapped ((tapping his
76		fingers on his papers)), I'm still handicapped ((tapping his fingers on his papers)).
77	Mediator	Yeah
78	Curt	And there are things that are owed to me and I don't understand where I'm going left and right
79		with this and I tried to fill out ((tapping his fingers on his papers)) every paperwork ((tapping
80		his fingers on his papers)) the way I need to ((tapping his fingers on his paper multiple times)).
81	Mediator	OK. ((nodding)) So now you= ((removing her glasses))
82	Curt	=I don't want to waste nobody's time; it's just what is due to me, and:: I think it's really unfair.
83	Mediator	Uhm uhm ((nodding)). OK so you met with your lawyer and you explained (.) the situation?
84	Lawyer	Yes
85	Curt	Yes
86	Mediator	OK.
87	Lawyer	I think

88 Mediator So, we'll try to see (.) you know, if there is something possible, this afternoon.
89 Lawyer ((smiling and nodding)) Yeah (.) When you're finished
90 Mediator No go [ahead
91 Lawyer [introducing
92 Mediator Go ahead, yeah yeah
93 Lawyer We don't want to cut you
94 Mediator Go ahead
95 Lawyer OK, so ((turning to Curt)) anything that is being said here, like I told you, is confidential
96 Curt Yes
97 Mediator Yeah, your lawyer explained to you
98 Curt Yes
99 Mediator What the:: conciliation was
100 Curt Yes
101 Mediator There's, usually there is no re- recording uh, it's only for the study
102 Curt I know, I know, [she told me, she told me
103 Mediator [OK? Contrary when uh when we have a hearing it's recorded, but
104 here in conciliation, nothing, OK.
105 ((Both Curt and his lawyer are nodding))
106 Mediator It's just sitting around the table to discuss, with the minister
107 Curt OK
108 Mediator OK? (0.5) So, it's your time, you know, to- (0.5) to ask question and to discuss and to=
109 Curt =I don't have any questions; like I said [me, I think it's a waste of time
110 Mediator [Hm
111 Curt that we are here (.) doing this like this, when like I said, I came here ((tapping his fingers on his
112 papers)) handicapped. Doctors told me what steps to take ((tapping his fingers on his papers))
113 Mediator hmm
114 Curt I got to offices some people don't want to treat me because I speak in English ((tapping
115 his fingers on his papers)). I don't understand what is going on ((tapping his fingers on
116 his papers)) I- I just want this resolved. That's [all I want
117 Lawyer [I don't think it's a waste of time, as- as I
118 explained to you, we're gonna know, because the [xxxx
119 Curt [No, for me, the way I am and I
120 perceive things, I don't like to waste people's time
121 Lawyer Oh OK
122 Mediator Oh no, no don't [worry about

123	Curt	[and right now, the way I see it, is I have to run left and right, sign
124		papers, you have to come here, this and that, when, to me, the way I see it is a clear cut
125	Mediator	[Yeahhhh
126	Curt	[And even my doctor sees that
127	Mediator	OK
128	Curt	it's a clear-cut case. (.) I came here handicapped, I'm still handicapped
129	Mediator	Yeah
130	Curt	I'm in therapy, now I'm going to see a therapist because, mainly (0.5) I can't function
131		like this ((putting his right hand on the side of his head))
132	Mediator	Mmm
133	Curt	I mean that, I'm in debt, it makes things nonsense, so I'm really so sorting out in therapy
134		because my, my body is affected ((showing his body with both hands)), I came here
135		with my body affected
136	Mediator	Yeah
137	Curt	But ever since I came here and I'm going through this ((putting hand on paperwork)),
138		now my mind is getting affected ((pointing to his head))
139	Mediator	So, we'll try as much as possible that when you leave today, you'll have answers and
140		it will be more clear for you, OK? (.) I hope you know, you'll go out
141	Lawyer	Yeah
142	Mediator	With some answers

As we see at the beginning of this excerpt, Curt's frustration keeps expressing itself, especially from lines 68 to 80, where we see him repeatedly tapping his finger on the documents, as if to mark everything that he has been trying to do to solve the issues he is confronted with. Although it is difficult to transcribe what intonations sound like, his tone is also clearly one of frustration, which can be heard as sounding like someone who has kept doing things that led him nowhere. As a frustration is supposed to express an *incapacity* to do something one wishes to obtain, we can also recognize in what he is saying what frustrates him: his lack of knowledge of how bureaucracy works, which, according to him, prevents him from getting the benefits and therefore the justice he deserves.

Regarding the lack of knowledge, this can be heard especially in "I don't know how the law works over here" (line 70), "I have no clue what's going on" (line 73), "I don't understand where I'm going left and right with this" (lines 78–79). As for the feeling of injustice, it can clearly be heard in "And there are things that are owed to me" (line 78) as well as in "It's just what is due to me and:: I think it's really unfair" (line 82). The feeling of frustration and injustice also appears exacerbated by his positioning himself as having done what needed to be done and as having got a lawyer. As he indeed points out, "My doctor told me what to do and this is what I did" (lines 71–72) and "This is why I got a lawyer in January

to help me represent me" (lines 73 and 75). Facts are also presented by Curt as speaking for themselves when he says, "Because I came here handicapped, I'm still handicapped" (lines 75–76).

Throughout his rant, which again, according to the procedure, should not be taking place at this point of the session, we can therefore hear the principle of justice expressing itself. As in the previous excerpt we analyzed, Curt's frustration thus seems so strong that he appears once more like someone who cannot help venting what he has to say. However, we also see how, this time, he expresses his care for others in this situation. As he points out at the end of this intervention, "I don't want to waste nobody's time" (line 82). In other words, if he values (like we all do) justice for himself, he also mentions his valuing of people's time. Another value can thus he heard here in this part of his intervention, which we could translate as a *concern for others*.

As Curt portrays the situation, two values appear therefore in conflict here: justice for himself vs. his concern for others, a conflict that can be explicitly heard when he says, "I don't want to waste nobody's time, it's just what is due to me, and:: I think it's really unfair." As he implicitly says, he wished he would not have to waste people's time on this, but everything happens as though he had no other choice but to be here to claim what is due to him. Again, we see how the value of justice is implicitly positioned as superseding everything else: not only the procedures he is flouting at this point but also his concern for other people, especially their time, which is here presented as spent for nothing, given what he considers to be the obviousness of his case.

Interestingly, we see that this concern for others is also implicitly expressed throughout his intervention by the mediator as she positions herself as paying attention to what Curt has to say, that is, as *valuing* his take on the situation. Although she could have pointed out that it was not the time for Curt to express his recriminations, given the procedure, she lets him talk and even welcomes what he has to say by nodding and acknowledging his points (lines 74, 77, and 81). This concern is also expressed when we she says, "So, we'll try to see (.) you know, if there is something possible" (line 88) to mark the openness of the situation, as well as when she tells Curt's lawyer that the latter can present his case. While the lawyer says that they are going to let the mediator finish her presentation (line 89) without cutting her (line 93), we hear the mediator repeatedly saying, "Go ahead" (lines 90, 92, and 94), as if to mark that she is willing to depart from the procedure to allow Curt's case to be presented by his lawyer.

A certain alignment is therefore taking place here to the extent that the mediator positions herself as valuing Curt's stance, which ultimately leads her to prioritize the presentation of his case over the compliance with procedures. Ventriloquially speaking, a certain concordance between their respective values thus expresses itself through this move on her part. As she also says in line 108, "Ok? (0.5) So, it's your time, you know, to- (0.5) to ask question and to discuss and to." As we see, however, Curt reacts to this invitation by saying that he has no question (line 109) and repeating what he previously said: that he "think[s] it's a waste of time" (line 109), that facts speak for themselves ("I came here handicapped," lines 111–12, see also line 128), that "doctors told [him] what step

to take" (line 112, see also line 126), that "[he doesn't] understand what is going on" (line 115). His only addition this time is that he "got to offices some people don't want to treat me because I speak in English" (line 114), which adds to the expression of his frustration.

Interestingly, we see his lawyer then interjecting by saying "I don't think it's a waste of time as- as I explained to you, we're gonna know because the xxx" (lines 117–18) as to mark that she herself *values* what they are doing at this moment. In other words, they are not wasting their time defending his position as it might result in his winning the case. This intervention then leads Curt to specify what he actually meant: "No, for me, the way I am and I perceive things, I don't like to waste people's time" (lines 119–20). In other words, he reaffirms that he himself *values* his interlocutors' time, even if he thinks it is objectively a waste of time, given that his situation is, for him, a clear-cut case (lines 124 and 128). This concern for others is reassured by the mediator when she says, "Oh no, no don't worry about that" (line 122).

At the end of his excerpt, we see how Curt also positions himself as *affected* by this whole story, not only financially ("I'm in debt," line 133), but also physically ("my body is affected," line 134) and mentally ("I'm in therapy," line 130; "now my mind is affected," lines 137–38). To justice, Curt then adds here the question of his own health, something that everybody is supposed to value and that is presented as jeopardized by this unfair treatment. To the weight of justice, which he presented as completely flouted by the way he has been treated so far, Curt then adds the weight of his own financial, physical, and mental health, which also requires, according to him, that this situation be solved in his favor.

Conclusion

So, what can be learned from this analysis? First, we saw how discourse and interaction appear governed by various forms of attachment that can be heard and recognized in what people say. If Curt presents and defends his position, if his lawyer reminds him that he has to follow the procedure, and if the mediator welcomes what he has to say to the detriment of the procedure, I was able to show that many other things could be heard as expressing themselves in this situation: not only the doctors and facts that Curt ventriloquizes in his interventions, but also his frustration, his concern for his own health, and his feeling of injustice. All these figures, which he implicitly or explicitly stages in his interventions, are presented as *dictating* him to present his case in the context of this mediation, even if he also cares for others, another concern that he also voices during the second excerpt.

As for the lawyer, we also saw how a concern for the procedure could be heard in her interventions, a concern that the mediator ultimately addresses by leaving the procedure aside to allow her and her client to say what they have to say. Finally, I also showed how in doing so, the mediator is also displaying a concern for Curt's situation, which ultimately aligns her with the values he is trying to put forward. The procedure dematerializes in this situation to the extent

that the mediator appears to decide that it should matter less than Curt's capacity to express his frustration.

As mentioned previously, two types of values can thus be heard in what the participants are saying in these two excerpts. On one side, you have what we could call "values per se," which, in this session, mainly take the form of principles such as justice, health, and care. These are values in the traditional sense of the term, as they function as principles that people, in general, tend to be attached to, especially but not only when these principles concern themselves. Etymologically, the term "principle" indeed comes from the Latin *primus*, which means "first," and from *capere*, which means "to take" or "grasp." Principles, by definition, are supposed to be what *guide* people in their decisions and actions, which explains why these principles are ventriloquized by the participants and why the participants ventriloquize them. These principles constitute, in many respects, the sources, origins, or roots of what these people are saying and doing, hence their status of *primus*.

On the other side, we identified figures like the procedure, the doctors, or the facts that are explicitly or implicitly presented as *valued* by the participants. They are not values in the traditional sense of the term, but they *have* a value for the people who ventriloquize them. For instance, we saw that it is apparently *out of a concern* for the procedure that Curt's lawyer intervened to ask her client to let the mediator present the grievances. We also saw how Curt appears to value what his doctors told him to do, as he refers twice to them to lend weight to his position. Finally, I also showed how Curt let facts speak for themselves (the fact, for instance, that he arrived in Quebec handicapped and that he is still handicapped today) to demonstrate what appears to be, according to him, a clear-cut case. In other words, he values these facts because they prove, in his opinion, that he deserves to receive benefits retrospectively that he should have received over the past ten years.

As we see, all these values, whether they are values per se (principles) or figures that are valued by the participants (doctors, facts, etc.), actively participate in what is happening in this mediation session as they appear to guide and govern what the participants are saying—participants that, as we saw, become their vectors. Dialogue and interaction more generally are value-laden because values are what animate us in a discussion. They animate us because they *matter* to us—that is, we are *attached* to them, which explains why they *materialize* in our interactions, whether implicitly or explicitly. It is this materialization that, I think, the ventriloquial approach allows us to unveil.

Between the realm of *qualities* (firstness) such as justice, health, and care, which *guide* and *govern* us (thirdness), we thus find secondness, the realm of communication and, more generally, action, which is what I have explored by studying these two excerpts. Even in the case where principles are not directly ventriloquized per se, figures are valued because of the qualities they display. For instance, the procedure is valued because of its quality of obligation. Similarly, what the doctors are saying is valued because of their knowledgeability. Finally, facts are usually valued because of their truthworthiness. In other words, we see

that interactants are constantly expressing, indirectly or directly, the values they are attached to through what they say and do. They are their vectors.

It is to this extent that we can say that dialogue and interaction are loaded with values. They are so because they express what *guides* our actions, whether these values themselves express a constraint (as in the case of obligations) or a desire (as in the case of justice). If we are *actors*, we are also *passers* to the extent *these values literally and figuratively pass through us and what we say*. It is these values that make our conducts accountable, but it is also they that define the ethical aspects of what we say and, more generally, do for another next first time.

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Ethics of Interreligious Dialogue: A Catholic Perspective

Fr. Dominic Maximilian Ofori

Abstract: This article seeks to present a Catholic perspective on the ethic that emerges from interreligious dialogue. It argues that such an ethic refers to the values that the Church protects and promotes as it enacts dialogue with non-Christian entities like Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or African Traditional Religion. For the Catholic Church, interreligious dialogue is a journey of love fraught with challenges, including the commitment to listen to hard truths about the self and the other, the commitment to answer the other's tough questions about the self, and the commitment to learn about the other in order to grow in self-understanding.

Keywords: Catholic Church; interreligious dialogue; ethics; religious other; communicative encounter

Introduction

Several scholars, particularly those in the discipline of religions, have engaged the topic of interreligious dialogue. For example, Catherine Cornille (2013a; 2013b) explained dialogue, interreligious dialogue, and the conditions for fruitful interreligious dialogue. Moreover, Leonard Swidler (2013) and Petra Dijkuizen (2015) have provided a historical narrative of the evolution of the interreligious dialogical movement. Furthermore, Douglas Pratt (2021) focused "on formal and representative developments of contemporary Christian engagement in interfaith relations, taking something of a case study approach in respect to the WCC [World Council of Churches] and the RCC [Roman Catholic Church]" (181). All these studies have significantly deepened our understanding of interfaith dialogue.

Besides, some communication scholars have looked at the construct of interreligious dialogue from a Catholic perspective. James A. Keaten and Charles Soukup (2009), for instance, have provided a model for interfaith dialogue. Additionally, Gregory Baum (2011) has argued that interreligious-dialogue skeptics can learn from the Catholic Church's dialogical engagement with non-Christian entities if they look at the Church's approach through an Enlightenment

prism. Clearly, then, interreligious dialogue as a construct and movement has been on the radar of scholars for quite some time.

The present article, however, is interested in the ethic that emerges from the enactment of interreligious dialogue, that is, the values that emerge from the how and what of interreligious dialogue. In other words, taking a cue from Johannesen et al. (2007), this article seeks to construct an ethic from how the Catholic Church thinks interreligious dialogue should be conducted and the values that it promotes and protects in communicative encounters with the religious other. Accordingly, the article takes a normative approach to interreligious dialogic ethics as it seeks to answer this central question: what values are promoted and protected when people from different religious traditions, especially adherents of the Catholic faith and non-Christian religions, dialogue with each other?

Following this introductory section, the article next reviews relevant literature. It further presents a narrative of Catholic views on interreligious dialogue as examined and explicated in official Church documents, namely, *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* (Secretariat for non-Christian Relations 1984); *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of Jesus Christ* (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991); and *Dialogue in Truth and Charity: Pastoral Orientations for Interreligious Dialogue* (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 2014). The essay subsequently constructs a normative ethics of interreligious dialogue and concludes by highlighting the key points of what constitutes Catholic interreligious dialogue and the ethic that emerges therefrom.

Scholarly Perspectives on Interreligious Dialogue

Broadly speaking, interreligious dialogue as a construct refers to the communicative engagement between different religious entities (see Cornille 2013a; Swidler 2013). As David M. McCarthy (2000) expressed, interreligious dialogue refers to "perspectives on how and why participants in various religions ought to talk with one another" (74). For Cornille (2013b), interreligious dialogue is "a constructive engagement between religious texts, teachings, and practices oriented toward the possibility of change and growth" (20). Similarly, Francis X. Clooney (2010a, 10; see also Niebauer 2017) asserted, "Interreligious dialogue points to actual conversations, sometimes formal and academic, sometimes simply interpersonal conversations among persons of different religious traditions willing to listen to one another and share their stories of faith and values." This view suggests that interreligious dialogue refers to the communication that takes place between at least two religious traditions, that is, either between two Christian denominations or between a Christian denomination like the Catholic Church and Islam.

However, the Catholic Church's conceptualization of interreligious dialogue is much more focused. In fact, the Church distinguishes between the

dialogue it conducts with other Christian denominations (ecumenical dialogue) and that with non-Christian entities (interreligious dialogue) (Arinze 2001; see also Nweke 2017). For the Church, interreligious dialogue is a communicative interaction between itself and adherents of non-Christian entities such as Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism (Arinze 2001).

Apart from seeking to unpack the meaning of interreligious dialogue, scholars have identified different models of interfaith dialogue. Paul F. Knitter (2013), for instance, talked about three categories of interreligious dialogue, namely, dialogue of theology, dialogue of spirituality, and dialogue of action. These categories, according to Knitter (2013), were based on the Vatican's perspective on interreligious dialogue. Sharing Knitter's perspective, Douglas Pratt (2021) pointed out that one might come out with different models of interreligious dialogue, depending on whether one is looking at the Vatican or the World Council of Churches. He identified the following as the Vatican's models of interreligious dialogue: ambassadorial dialogue, propaedeutic dialogue, and humanitarian dialogue (Pratt 2021, 196). However, he identified systematic dialogue, communitarian dialogue, and relational dialogue as the models of interreligious dialogue from the perspective of the World Council of Churches (194).

Furthermore, a review of extant literature shows a keen scholarly interest in the conditions or requirements for interreligious dialogue. Conceptualizing these conditions as commandments that should guide the conduct of interreligious dialogue, Swidler (1985) proposed ten of them. Firstly, Swidler (1985) stated that the purpose of interreligious dialogue is to grow and change in the way we perceive reality. Secondly, interreligious dialogue must be two-sided (Swidler 1985). Thirdly, interreligious participants must be honest and sincere, and, fourthly, we must assume that the religious other at the table of interreligious dialogue is also honest and sincere. Next, interreligious dialogical participants must clearly define themselves. Further, they must not predetermine the points of disagreement. Additionally, participants must understand that they are all equal. Moreover, authentic interreligious dialogue requires mutual trust on the part of participants. Participants must be willing to be self-critical and "eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion 'from within'" (Swidler 1985, 33).

Unlike Swidler (2013), Cornille (2013b) has proposed five conditions for the fruitful enactment of interreligious dialogue, or, as Knitter (2013, 134) conceptualized them, "virtue ethics for dialogue," that is, humility, commitment, interconnection, empathy, and hospitality. For Cornille (2013b), to be humble means to be willing to change one's perspective within one's faith tradition, recognizing the human being's inability to grasp revealed truth fully. Besides, interreligious participants must be committed to their religious traditions. Moreover, participants must understand the interconnection between their own faith tradition and that of the religious other. Such an interconnection materializes in the common interest religious organizations show in socio-political causes like "poverty, hunger, homelessness, war, or natural disasters" (25). Interreligious dialogic participants must also demonstrate empathy toward the religious other by "stretching [their] religious imagination beyond the categories of [their] own

religion and gain[ing] some understanding of, and resonance with, religious teachings and practices other than one 's own" (26). Finally, hospitality as a condition for interreligious dialogue "involves recognition of actual truth in another religion and hospitality toward integrating that truth in one's own tradition" (26).

Similar to Cornille's (2013b) five-point conditions for interreligious dialogue, Knitter (2013) suggested five guidelines for socially engaged dialogue: compassion, conversion, collaboration, comprehension, and communion (144–46). Knitter (2013) explained that the compassion that both a Christian and Muslim, for example, would show to the same suffering victims might surprisingly be extended toward each other. In this way, compassion serves as a condition for the initial encounter between the two people from different faith traditions. Following compassion is conversion, a change in perspective. As Knitter (2013, 145) explained,

> The feeling of compassion by which the suffering of others has touched our lives will call for a reciprocal response by which we reach back to them in the determination to touch and affect their lives. Compassion will call for *con-version*; otherwise it is not real compassion. And con-version is the resolve to, literally, *con-vertere*, to turn things around in one's own life for the sake of others.

As they both show compassion to the same suffering victims and one another, as well as change their old perspectives, the Christian and Muslim begin "to [act] for them and with them on their behalf" (Knitter 2013, 145). In other words, following their change of attitude toward one another, the Christian and Muslim move on to mutual understanding (or comprehension). Finally, the two interreligious dialoguers move to a level of communion in which they share religious rituals together in the same space. Knitter (2013) referenced his past experience of working to broker peace among enemies who belonged to different faith traditions to buttress his point:

> Such "communions" took place in rituals in which we read from and reflected on our sacred scriptures together, prayed or expressed our intentions together, listened to our music or chanting together, and also, simply sat in silence together in the same space. (146)

Clearly, for Knitter (2013), the ideal interreligious dialogue involves several stages, beginning with compassion and culminating in the communion of the parties.

Looking at the literature, this article finds that scholarly interest in the subject of interreligious dialogue has generally focused on meaning and applicability. In other words, relevant scholarly interest has sought to answer the questions: What is interreligious dialogue? How is it different from non-Catholic views? What are the models of interreligious dialogue? And what are the conditions for the enactment of interreligious dialogue?

For the present article, in spite of the keen interest scholars have largely shown in Catholic perspective on interreligious dialogue, the question of the ethic that emerges from the communicative encounter between parties from Christian

and non-Christian faith traditions has yet to receive attention from communication studies. In other words, communication scholars have not yet made any effort to attend to the question of the values that should guide interreligious dialogue nor to focus on the values that Catholic interreligious dialogue protects and promotes. For the present article, these are legitimate questions that deserve scholarly attention.

The Nature of Catholic Interreligious Dialogue

This section engages the nature of Catholic interreligious dialogue through the prism of constructive hermeneutics, which involves the article immersing itself with an open mind in the three main documents on Catholic interreligious dialogue (see Thiselton 2009; Gadamer 1989). To that extent, the essay acknowledges that it comes to the subject of Catholic interreligious dialogue with a perspective shaped by a complex mix of the present historical moment, as well as African, American, and Catholic values. It accordingly comes to the question of the Catholic view on interreligious dialogue with an enlarged mentality and a listening attitude (see Arendt 1982). In this section, the article examines the nature of interreligious dialogue as conceptualized by the Catholic Church by answering the following question: How does the Catholic Church communicate about and enact interreligious dialogue in its engagement with non-Christian religious entities?

As is clear from the three documents referenced above, interreligious dialogue is a communicative encounter involving two or more religious entities with the purpose of arriving at a mutual understanding of what each party believes (see also PCID 1997, 2006). As the Secretariat for Non-Christian Relations (SNR) (1984) expressed it, "dialogue . . . means not only discussion, but also includes all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment" (§3). Implicit in this earlier official Church definition is the recognition that the phenomenon of interreligious dialogue is enacted at both verbal and nonverbal communicative levels—that is, interreligious dialogue is both a discussion and a relation with the religious other. Moreover, the goal of this interfaith communicative encounter is to engender mutual understanding and mutual enrichment—that is, as interreligious dialogue parties relate verbally and nonverbally, they come to know and appreciate one another's belief system, learn from one another, and possibly grow in their respective faith traditions.

This hermeneutic of the Church's definition of interreligious dialogue is consistent with the view expressed in the second main document on the same subject published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) in 1991. According to PCID (1991), interreligious dialogue refers to

> all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions. (§9)

In other words, interreligious dialogue is not a mere conversation that different religious groups have with each other. Rather, it is enacted at the nexus of interfaith relationship, one that is positive and constructive. This relationship is both interpersonal and inter-communal, framed by the search for truth and respect for religious liberty. This search for truth consists in interreligious dialogue partners' witnessing to their respective faith traditions even as they explore what the religious other believes.

Building on earlier conceptualizations, PCID in 2014 defined interreligious dialogue in a much deeper and more expansive way:

> In the context of religious plurality, it means not only discussion, but also constructive relations with individuals and communities of other religions, which, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom, are directed at mutual understanding. It includes witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions. With reference to the initiatives of the Catholic Church to reach out to people of other religions, dialogue is also understood as an attitude of respect and friendship which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting her evangelizing mission in the world. (§2)

In this definition, PCID (2014) brought coherence to its earlier conceptualizations in 1984 and 1991. The following coordinates are significant for an appreciation of interreligious dialogue: (a) the reality of religious plurality as a context; (b) interreligious dialogue as a discussion; (c) interreligious dialogue as a constructive relationship; (d) interreligious dialogue as a response to the need to search for the truth; (e) interreligious dialogue as a communicative encounter among members of religious groups who enjoy religious freedom as a fundamental right (see Pope Paul VI 1965, *Dignitatis Humanae*); (f) mutual understanding as the goal of interreligious dialogue; (g) witnessing as a key component of interreligious dialogue; (h) exploring the faith tradition of dialogue partners as part of the orientation of interreligious dialogue; (i) respecting the religious other as a key component of interreligious dialogue; (j) and establishing friendship with the religious other as a key orientation of interreligious dialogue.

As a communicative encounter, interreligious dialogue, from a Catholic perspective, creates the possibility for partners to learn about and understand each other. In other words, the communicative space created by interreligious dialogue makes it possible for non-Christian religious groups to be "known honestly and esteemed justly by Christians, and that in their turn non-Christians can adequately know and esteem Christian doctrine and life" (SNR 1984, §4). Beyond ensuring mutual understanding and appreciation, interreligious dialogue allows Christians to meet non-Christians "in order to walk together towards truth and to work together in projects of common concern" (SNR 1984, §13).

As is clear from the Church's definition of interreligious dialogue, partners search for the truth in complete freedom:

> Truth, however, is to be sought in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication, and dialogue. In the course of these, men explain to one another the truth they have discovered or claim to

> have discovered in order to help one another in their search for the truth (Pope Paul VI 1965, §3 as quoted in SNR 1984, §18).

Part of the truth which the Church has found in its dialogic encounters with other religions is the facticity of God's presence in the great non-Christian traditions of the globe, a divine presence expressed variously as "elements which are true and good," "precious things, both religious and human," "seeds of contemplation," "elements of truth and grace," "seeds of the Word," and "rays of the truth which illumines all mankind" (SNR 1984, §26). It is this indubitable presence of God in non-Christian milieus that imposes on the Church the obligation of interreligious dialogue (§26). This particular dialogue, in the view of the Catholic Church, "is a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one's conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality towards the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, his modes of expression, and his values" (§29). In other words, the existential reality of the Church must be framed by the register of dialogue. As PCID (1991, §39) rightly pointed out, "(Interreligious) dialogue is fundamental to the Church, which is called to collaborate in God's plan with her methods of presence, respect and love towards all persons."

Yet interreligious dialogue recognizes the limitations of interlocutors. The human reality is that no one is perfect. Often the limitations might be due to immoral choices or inaccurate interpretation of divine revelation (see PCID 1991, §31, §79). Yet, in spite of the existential reality of interlocutor limitations, the Catholic view of interreligious dialogue is that it calls for openness to the religious other's traditions. This openness is made possible through "attentive dialogue that recogniz[es] and accept[s] cultural values which respect the human person's dignity and transcendent destiny" (§46).

Dialogic openness, though, does not ignore fundamental differences between traditions. As PCID (1991, §31) has pointed out, "It must, where necessary, recognize that there is incompatibility between some fundamental elements of the Christian religion and some aspects of such traditions." In the face of intractable differences, dialogue partners are invited to challenge each other "in a peaceful spirit" (§32) over their traditions and to respond when challenged.

For the Catholic Church, the foundation of its commitment to dialogue with other religions is both anthropological and theological (PCID 1991; PCID 2014). Anthropologically, the Church is "closely united to men in their life and work"; therefore, "Christ's disciples hope to render to others true witness of Christ and to work for this salvation, even where they are not able to proclaim Christ fully" (PCID 1991, §39; see also Vatican II 2007). Theologically, "God, in an age-long dialogue, has offered and continues to offer salvation to humankind. In faithfulness to the divine initiative, the Church too must enter into a dialogue of salvation with all men and women" (PCID 1991, §38). In other words, just as God's relationship with humanity is grounded in dialogue, so must the Church dialogue with the peoples of the world as it seeks to bring the word of God to them.

The Church's interreligious dialogue with non-Christians aims at mutual understanding, friendly relations, witnessing to interlocutors' respective beliefs, and the explorations of their religious convictions, as well as the opportunity to

grow in their respective faith traditions (PCID 1991, §40). In other words, as PCID (1991) explained, interreligious dialogue aims

> to eliminate tensions and conflicts, and potential confrontations by a better understanding among the various religious cultures of any given region. It may contribute to purifying cultures from any dehumanizing elements, and thus be an agent of transformation. It can also help to uphold certain traditional cultural values which are under threat from modernity and the levelling down which indiscriminate internationalization may bring with it. (§46)

Clearly, positive interreligious dialogue leads to peaceful coexistence among people from different religious traditions, a reality which cannot be ignored.

For the Catholic Church, interreligious dialogue has four main forms (SNR 1984, §29, §31, §33, §35; see also PCID 1991; PCID 2014), namely, the "dialogue of life" (SNR, §29), "dialogue of deeds" (SNR 1984, §31), "dialogue of specialists" (SNR 1984, §33), and "dialogue of religious experience" (SNR 1984, §35). The dialogue of life is the form of dialogue that all Christians engage in with people they live and work with (see Arinze 2001; Hall 2005). In other words, the dialogue of life may occur in a "family, social, educational, artistic, economic, or political" environment (SNR 1984, §30). Within such environments, people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit in order to share their joys and sorrows, as well as other human problems and preoccupations (PCID 2014, §34). The dialogue of deeds or action, however, refers to Christian "collaboration with others for goals of a humanitarian, social, economic, or political nature which are directed towards the liberation and advancement of mankind" (SNR 1984, §31; see also PCID 1991; 2014; Arinze 2001). The dialogue of specialists or "theological exchange" (PCID 2014, §34) is the form of dialogue that Chrisitan theologians have with specialists from other faith traditions (SNR 1984; PCID 1991; 2014; see also Arinze 2001). Within this dialogic context, dialogue partners may "confront, deepen, and enrich their respective religious heritages or . . . apply something of their expertise to the problems which must be faced by mankind in the course of its history" (SNR 1984, §33). By so doing, specialists deepen their understanding of those religions represented at the table of dialogue (PCID 2014). The result is that expert participants "come to a mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's spiritual values and cultural categories and promote communion and fellowship among people" (SNR 1984, §34). Finally, the dialogue of religious experience is the encounter that occurs when participants, deeply rooted in their faith traditions

> share their experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith, and duty, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for the Absolute. This type of dialogue can be a mutual enrichment and fruitful cooperation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals of man. It leads naturally to each partner communicating to the other the reasons for his own faith. (SNR 1984, §35; see also Arinze 2001; Gerard Hall 2005; Knitter 2013)

What emerges from this dialogic encounter is, on the one hand, the truth about God's self-revelation to human beings regardless of their religious background, and, on the other, the truth about every human being's desire to search for God.

Moreover, the Church has clarified the attitudes or dispositions that interreligious dialogue interlocutors must possess: "balanced attitude" (PCID 1991, §47), "religious conviction" (PCID 1991, §48), "openness to the truth" (PCID 1991, §49), and "new dimensions of faith" (PCID 1991, §50). To have a balanced attitude, participants in interreligious dialogue must on the one hand be open, receptive, unselfish, impartial, committed to the truth, and willing to be transformed. As well, they must accept differences and contradictions (PCID 1991, §47). On the other hand, religious conviction as a disposition means that participants enter the arena of interreligious dialogue firmly grounded in their faith.

Besides, openness to the truth during the interreligious dialogic process suggests that though Catholics, for instance, might have received the fullness of truth, it does not follow that they have fully grasped it or are actually living it on daily basis. In this regard, being open to the truth means redirecting one's steps toward that which has been abandoned or has not been fully understood. As PCID (1991, §50) explained,

> In the last analysis truth is not a thing we possess, but a person by whom we must allow ourselves to be possessed. This is an unending process. While keeping their identity intact, Christians must be prepared to learn and to receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions. Through dialogue they may be moved to give up ingrained prejudices, to revise preconceived ideas, and even sometimes to allow the understanding of their faith to be purified.

Finally, dialogic interactions with religious others can deepen the religious convictions of participants. Having their faith deepened does not suggest a lack of religious conviction, though. As PCID (2014, §3) made clear, "Those who promote interreligious dialogue must be persons well-formed in their particular traditions, possessing a clear religious identity." Explaining how interreligious encounter can positively impact the Christian, PCID (1991, §50) declared, "Far from weakening their own faith, true dialogue will deepen it. They will become increasingly aware of their Christian identity and perceive more clearly the distinctive elements of the Christian message." And as they come to realize the active presence of Jesus outside the physical boundaries of the Church, "their faith will gain new dimensions" (§50).

In 2014, PCID reconceptualized the above dispositions as personal qualities and attitudes that are necessary for interreligious dialogue, including "firmness of religious conviction; readiness to understand people of other religious traditions without pretence, prejudice, or close-mindedness; genuine love; humility; prudence; honesty, and patience," as well as both theoretical and reciprocal respect (§§40–41).

By coming to the table of interreligious dialogue with the four attitudes, participants can navigate the human obstacles that every so often undermine

interreligious dialogue. PCID (2014) listed the following as the obstacles that usually undercut authentic interreligious dialogue:

> a) insufficient grounding in one's own faith;
> b) insufficient knowledge and understanding of the belief and practices of other religions, leading to a lack of appreciation for their significance and even at times to misrepresentation;
> c) socio-political factors or some burdens of the past;
> d) wrong understanding of the meaning of terms such as conversion, baptism, dialogue, etc.;
> e) self-sufficiency, lack of openness leading to defensive or aggressive attitudes;
> f) a lack of conviction with regard to the value of interreligious dialogue, which some may see as a task reserved to specialists, and others as a sign of weakness or even a betrayal of the faith;
> g) suspicion about the other's motives in dialogue;
> h) a polemical spirit when expressing religious convictions;
> i) intolerance, which is often aggravated by association with political, economic, racial and ethnic factors;
> j) a lack of reciprocity in dialogue which can lead to frustration;
> k) certain features of the present religious climate, e.g., growing materialism, religious indifference, and the multiplication of religious sects which creates confusion and raises new problems. (§52)

With the right kind of attitudes, interreligious participants should be able to contain these obstacles to authentic dialogue. This authentic dialogue in a pluralistic religious environment seeks nothing but "a clear understanding of the common good, acknowledges the presence of legitimate diversity, respects the human and political rights of all citizens, and promotes a shared determination" to construct a world of justice and solidarity (PCID 2006, 634).

A Catholic Interreligious Dialogic Ethic

Based on the above articulation of the Catholic understanding of the nature of interreligious dialogue, this article identifies the following coordinates as constituting some of the values that ought to be protected and promoted in the communicative encounter with the religious other: identity, difference, witness/testimony, listening, responding, forgiveness and trust, recognition and acknowledgment, affirmation, interconnectedness/relationship, and narrative participation. This article argues that the coordinates here listed constitute the defining values that Catholic interreligious dialogue protects and promotes.

In the first place, an authentic interreligious dialogue values the distinctive identities of interlocutors. In other words, those who engage in interfaith dialogue must have a clear understanding of who they are along with the religious traditions that they represent. Besides, interreligious dialogue protects and promotes diversity or difference, not uniformity. Thus, the whole purpose of the dialogue between the Catholic Church and non-Christian religions is not purposed

to proselytize, to turn non-Christians into Catholics. In fact, within the dialogic space created by interfaith encounters, differences of religious traditions and differences of spiritualities must be acknowledged, respected, and affirmed (see also Anderson et al. 2004).

Moreover, interreligious dialogic encounters protect and promote the communicative act of witnessing to one's faith at the table of dialogue. For the Catholic Church, religious liberty is a fundamental human right. Accordingly, interreligious dialogue participants must be able to witness freely to the truth of their faith. But for this communicative act to succeed, dialogue partners must listen with empathy and respect. In this way, they are be able to understand and appreciate the faith tradition of the religious other and even challenge the other's doctrinal positions and religious practices—a challenge that calls for a fitting response.

Furthermore, interreligious dialogue between the Church and non-Christians protects and promotes the value of mutual forgiveness and trust. If the communication between the Church and other religions can be conceptualized as a turning toward the other in sincerity, then such an encounter must necessarily involve the act of letting go of past wrongs and the forging of mutual trust as dialogue partners recognize their common humanity demonstrated in their common search for answers to life's deep questions regarding human dignity and humanity's transcendent destiny. At the end of the day, the Catholic and Muslim are both human beings who must deal with the same challenges in the world they live in and share with each other (see Vatican Council II 2007)

Additionally, interreligious dialogue protects and promotes the related values of recognition, acknowledgement, and affirmation. These coordinates are a *sine qua non* for authentic dialogic encounters. As Arinze (2001) pointed out, interreligious dialogue is not a debate; rather, it is an encounter between friends who are committed to talking to each other about their religious beliefs or are willing to work together to resolve common social problems. Accordingly, therefore, they must authentically recognize the value of each other's faith, acknowledge the significant contribution each makes to human flourishing, and subsequently affirm each other.

In recognizing, acknowledging, and affirming each other and their faith traditions, interreligious partners end up establishing deep bonds of friendship and communion. In other words, interfaith dialogue builds interconnectedness and relationships among partners who subsequently engage in narrative participation relating to their common humanity and transcendent destiny.

Conclusion

This article has sought to provide a coherent narrative of ethics of interreligious dialogue from a Catholic perspective. In pursuit of its goal, it engaged three main documents which provide the official position of the Church on the subject. As a communicative encounter between Christians and non-Christians, interreligious dialogue provides space for partners to collaborate in the search for the truth—the

truth about God and the truth about humanity. In the process, interreligious dialogue creates space for personal growth and mutual enrichment, even as it engenders friendly bonds and communion. This communicative reality, which affects humanity and its highest aspirations, protects and promotes the values of identity, difference, witness/testimony, listening, responding, forgiveness and trust, recognition and acknowledgment, affirmation, interconnectedness/ relationship, and narrative participation.

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Ethical Credo for Virtual Teams: A Case Study of a Long-Term Virtual Team

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Abstract: Virtual teams have become indispensable to organizations. This research study examines ethical and behavioral communicative practices that promote flourishing long-term virtual teams. From a communication ethics perspective, this study uses a thematic analysis of responses from a qualitative, in-depth written interview. The findings point to values that support ethical communication within a long-term virtual team. The results are operationalized and presented as a credo of ethical practices to be used by organizations as a tool for discussion among virtual team members. The Credo for Ethical Communication in Virtual Teams includes principles of care, commitment, respect, adaptability, authenticity, valuing the other, and trust.

Keywords: communication ethics; ethical credo; virtual teams; small group communication; authentic leadership and followership

In a world of globalized technology, virtual teams[1] are integral to organizations and have made the ability to work with people in different geographic locations an everyday reality. Barrero, Bloom, and Davis (2023) report that 40.9% of the global workforce is either completely online (12.7%) or partially working from home (28.2%). Upwork (Ozimek 2021) predicts that there will be 40.7 million fully remote professionals in the United States by 2025. This prediction corresponds to the data on employees' desire to work remotely. A 2023 State of Remote Work Report indicates that 98% of workers desire to work remotely in some capacity (Griffis 2023). In response to this report, *Forbes* contributor Kathy Haan (2023) explains, "This overwhelming figure reflects the workforce's growing affinity towards the flexibility, autonomy and work-life balance that remote work offers" (Haan 2023, para. 6). Scholarly work by Meluso et al. (2022) asserts that two-thirds

[1] We acknowledge that there are multiple definitions for "teams" and "small groups" across different disciplines. For this article, we use them interchangeably.

of organizations consider the change to remote work permanent. The pivot to virtual work creates significant changes within organizations that include revisions to strategic plans, hiring, onboarding practices, performance reviews, and leadership structure (Ozimek 2021). With these changes, virtual teams are a mainstay of organizations. Thus, there is an ongoing need to understand them.

Virtual teams are defined by El Idrissi and Fourka (2025) as "groups of people who work interdependently towards a common goal across geographical, temporal, and organizational boundaries, using technology to communicate and collaborate" (El Idrissi and Fourka, 2025, 1). Similarly, Yael Zolfi offers a simpler definition in A Manager's Guide to Virtual Teams: "A virtual team—whether across the street or across the world—is a team whose members simultaneously work together to a common purpose, while physically apart" (Zolfi, 2011, 7). The appeal of virtual teams is twofold: first, the ability to manage one's personal and professional life becomes easier, and second, there is greater opportunity to interact with colleagues from around the world (Ferrazzi 2014, para. 2). However, there are drawbacks to virtual teams. In comparison to face-to-face teams, virtual teams are more likely to experience decreased collaboration (Jing et al. 2021), less trust (Ackerman 2000), less cohesion (DeRosa et al. 2004), less satisfaction (Cicei 2012), less creativity (Brucks and Levav 2022), and decreased commitment (Blaskovich 2008). In a review of empirical studies of remote work, Olson and Olson (2006) indicate that, although there is improvement in understanding virtual teams, issues such as these remain a challenge and must be addressed.

This study aims to help improve the performance of long-term virtual teams by providing recommendations that address the challenges members often encounter. In this paper, we show the need for research on virtual teams by drawing on scholarship from multiple disciplines. We explain our methodology, which takes a "bottom-up approach" (Hill and Rapp 2014, 621) through a consensus driven thematic analysis. The results are presented as a Credo for Ethical Communication in Virtual Teams (hereafter "Credo") which provides useful guidelines for ethical communication among members of virtual teams that can be easily shared by practitioners. We then discuss the values imbued in the Credo to provide insights from multidisciplinary perspectives. We conclude with implications, applications, and benefits of this study.

Literature Review

Communication Ethics

Virtual teams can be complicated and produce a high amount of uncertainty. For this reason, we draw on communication ethics as a resource to inform our understanding of them. Scholars argue that communication ethics is a "pragmatic necessity" (Fritz et al. 2023, 1) and a "vital resource in an ever-changing world" (Ballard et al. 2016, 155). Communication ethics has been defined in various ways. This project relies on the definition of communication ethics by Fritz, Bell McManus, and Kearney (2023) as "the study of philosophy of communication

brought into engaged communicative application" (32). The philosophy (why) and the applied (how) work together to protect and promote various goods in a diverse world. Communication ethics is central to the communication discipline (Ballard et al. 2016) and has been applied to many facets of communication, such as organizational (Seeger 2004), interpersonal (Fritz 2016a), small group (Gastil and Sprain 2011), intercultural (Evanoff 2020), health (Hyde 2016), and media (Christians 2019). Moreover, communication ethics is seen as an essential component within our everyday interactions with others. As Jovanovic and co-authors (2021) state, "communication ethics requires asking questions, thinking about the possibilities, and reflecting on the consequences" (1). A communication ethics perspective frames this research as we inquire about virtual teams and study the ethical and behavioral communicative practices that support them.

Organizations draw upon codes of conduct as a guideline for ethical decision making. For example, the Public Relations Society of America, the American Advertising Federation, the American Medical Association, and the National Communication Association all have standards for professional behavior. This research uses the term "credo" as distinct from a code of conduct, exemplifying core values and principles not as a mandate but as a worthy pursuit (Engleberg 2004). These guidelines act as ethics in praxis or theory informing action (Meloncon et al. 2020) to help people understand the relevance and importance of ethics in everyday communicative interactions (Strawser 2019). With a rise in remote work, credos that address the unique setting of virtual teams can be a valuable resource for guiding behavior and shaping culture.

Ethics and Virtual Teams

The study of ethics in virtual workplaces is limited. Gupta and Pathak (2022) describe it as "scarcely researched" (para. 1). However, the need for this research is evident, with journal special editions focusing on ethics in virtual organizational contexts such as education (the *Journal of Literacy & Technology* in 2020) and training and human resources (the *European Journal of Training and Development* in 2022). In a 30-year review of the *Journal of Business Ethics*, Calabretta et al. (2011) point out three primary topics within business ethics publications: ethical decision making, corporate social responsibility, and the theoretical discussion of business ethics as a moral foundation. Although all three are important to the field of business ethics, Calabretta and co-authors argue for future studies to include more research that affects practitioners. They found that research relating to managerial practices "remains mostly unexplored" (521). Additionally, Cabana and Kapstein (2018) identify the importance of studying ethical organizational culture at a sub-organizational or team level. Their research indicates that, even within the same organization, teams can have differing ethical cultures that influence "the frequency of unethical behavior and employee responses to unethical behavior" (761). As a result, the individual's behaviors within those teams shape the team's ethical culture. Evidence of this is seen in the literature on leadership (Martin et al. 2022; White and Lean 2008) and group members (Barnett and Karon 1987; Deng et al. 2021; Martinez et al. 2021; Swenson-Lepper 2005) wherein individual behaviors

influence the team's decisions and ethical culture. Ramachandran et al. (2022) summarize their research:

> [We found] both personal and collective virtues are significant for organisations to emerge as good citizens. Good corporate citizenship indicates the roles of individuals in the organisation to look beyond rules and compliance, to demonstrate ethical individualism which then forms an ethical culture. (76)

This article answers the call to be practitioner focused and highlights the importance of addressing team versus organizational culture. It does so by providing results in a credo that gives ethical principles and corresponding behaviors, allowing team members to recognize the personal and collective nature of ethical team membership.

Overall, this study is designed to deepen our understanding of the ethics of virtual team communication and provide a credo that can help organizations optimize the performance of long-term virtual teams. The following research questions guided our study:

RQ1: How does a long-term virtual team describe the ethical values that support their team's efficacy?

RQ2: What behaviors do team members suggest to operationalize ethical values?

Methods

Virtual Team Composition

Nine members of a virtual team participated in this study. Although they share a common interest in communication ethics, they differ in academic ranks and professional perspectives, including academic and practitioner foci as well as divergent methodological commitments. Of the eight women and one man, seven self-identify as Caucasian, and two identify as members of racially or other historically marginalized groups. All are members of the National Communication Association (NCA) and the Communication Ethics Division of that association. At the time of the study, the group had worked together for over 11 years and produced 14 conference presentations, a textbook (Jovanovic et al. 2021), and two scholarly articles (Ballard et al. 2014; Swenson-Lepper et al. 2015). Because the members of this group teach and research communication ethics, they are apt to engage in communication practices that support ethical communication and small group communication. Although this makes the group unique, it also means that the group provides valuable insights about how to succeed in a diverse, ethical, and effective long-term group. The range of these collective experiences enriches the quality of the analysis and increases transparency in the research process.

Qualitative Research Approaches

This project used three qualitative approaches that work together to safeguard the integrity of the research. They include an overarching self-study method (S-STTEP), collaborative qualitative data analysis (CQA) for coding agreement and reliability, and thematic analysis methodology. Since participants were both the researchers and subjects, it was important to have strong controls. For guidance, we turned to Pinnegar and Hamilton's (2009) work on self-study as a genre of qualitative research. In the wake of the crisis of representation—the struggle to adequately capture lived experience in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 2005)—Pinnegar and Hamilton explore the notion of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices, or S-STTEP:

> Research using this methodology allows researchers to document not only what they learn about teaching and teacher education from the study of them, but also the tacit and personal practical knowledge they possess that contributes to our knowledge and understanding of teaching. (3)

Key to a self-study methodology is to "rigorously [take] into account the researchers' position as both the researcher and researched and as having a central role in the practice being studied" (v). Although S-STTEP is primarily used in teaching, it shares common aspects of other qualitative approaches, such as the recognition of the self in the researcher/researched dynamic and a commitment to improvement. Pinnegar and Hamilton outline five elements of self-study: "it is self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative, methods; and it defines validity as a process of trustworthiness" (82). This project incorporates the elements of a self-study. The research was initiated within the team and focused on improving virtual teams. Throughout the process, we used consensus-building discussions; furthermore, in coding and analysis, we used qualitative methods of a written interview, observations, and discussions. To ensure trustworthiness and the minimization of individual bias (Richards and Hemphill 2018), we followed collaborative qualitative data analysis (CQA) in the coding process.

Richards and Hemphill (2018) provide six criteria of CQA to ensure coding agreement and reliability. "These steps include (a) preliminary organization and planning, (b) open and axial coding, (c) the development of a preliminary codebook, (d) pilot testing the codebook, (e) the final coding process, and (f) review of the codebook and finalizing the themes" (226). The CQA method was selected because of its rigorous triangulation standards and fit within a self-study approach. The multiplicity of perspectives in the group worked to increase the trustworthiness and transparency of this qualitative research by taking into account stories generated by a wide range of experiences. The next section explains the procedures of CQA and the thematic analysis.

Procedure

In application of the preliminary organization and planning stage of CQA, two of the team members created initial interview questions that were sent to the group for comment and final revisions. Examples of the interview questions are: "What is the story you tell about this group?", "What do you see as the overall goal of the group?", and "What keeps you in this group?"[2] Team members sent their written responses to one group member for collating. Open coding took place through remote meetings to identify patterns in the data and note aberrations and outliners. The responses of the group were coded, which resulted in 21 open codes that were narrowed to 15 axial codes and used for the preliminary codebook. Later, the final codebook was tested for coding conventions and applied to all data.

Subsequent to the application of CQA to code the data, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was used to identify common themes. Their approach overlaps CQA and extends to the analysis of themes, which includes (1) becoming familiar with the entirety of the data, (2) generating key-word coding categories, (3) compiling resulting themes, (4) reviewing the themes, (5) defining and naming the themes, and (6) producing a report with selected exemplars of the themes. After data coding, the results were compiled, and initial themes were reviewed by individual members to ensure accuracy and intent of their own quotes. After considering members' quotes that exemplified the themes, the group revised the themes until all members were in agreement. During the refinement process, consideration was given to latent themes and results pertinent to the research questions (84). Following several iterations of analyses and reaching consensus, four preliminary themes stood out: support, commitment, respect, and fairness. Through discussion, it became clear that too much nuance was lost by narrowing the themes, and a decision was made to broaden the themes to seven. The group selected interview quotes to exemplify the themes and operationalize them in the behaviors listed in the credo.

Results

The research results are seven distinct themes that illuminate promising team member behaviors for virtual long-term small groups. For this team, distinguishing ethical communication themes include (1) care for the Other, (2) commitment, (3) respect, (4) adaptability, (5) authenticity, (6) valuing the Other, and (7) trust. Each theme is associated with behaviors that operationalize its meaning. These themes, identified as "principles," and their supporting behaviors are presented in the Credo for Ethical Communication in Virtual Teams.

[2] A complete list of questions is available from the first author.

Credo for Ethical Communication in Virtual Teams

Principle 1: Team members demonstrate CARE for one another.

- We actively pursue getting to know each other, professionally as well as personally.
- We show concern about the whole person and act on requests for help.
- We celebrate individual members' successes.
- We help when a tragedy occurs in a member's life.
- We are willing to go above and beyond what is expected to show support to an individual member.

Principle 2: Team members demonstrate a COMMITMENT to group and individual goals of the team members.

- We work toward an equitable workload as a demonstration of the value each person brings to tasks and projects.
- We all share responsibility through the completion of a project.
- We meet deadlines, keep agreements, and submit our best work.
- We help each other understand our contributions and roles.
- We take ownership of shared goals and respect if an individual chooses to leave the group to pursue other goals.

Principle 3: Team members RESPECT each other

- We utilize and appreciate others' strengths.
- We recognize each team member's ability to make decisions.
- We intentionally learn each other's goals, skill sets, and previous work.
- We honor and acknowledge differing perspectives.
- We are inclusive.

Principle 4: Team members are ADAPTABLE.

- We listen to alternative ways to accomplish a task and are open to change when the current way is not working.
- We take leadership initiative, regardless of role or contribution, in order to advance shared goals.
- We follow when another group member leads.
- We are open to feedback when our idea is not working and do not force our way on others.

Principle 5: Team members are AUTHENTIC with each other.

- We state what we honestly think about an issue in a respectful and caring manner.
- We strive for high task outcomes by expressing differences.
- We indicate when we are struggling with a task.
- We provide feedback for individual growth and to accomplish shared goals.
- We communicate our opinions in conflict with care and respect.

Principle 6: Virtual team members VALUE each person.

- We look for qualities to like about one another.
- We never take advantage of another member's generosity.
- We find time to laugh together.
- We find ways to enjoy our time together.
- We find commonalities with each other.

Principle 7: Virtual team members TRUST each other.

- We act with integrity by doing what we say we are going to do.
- We believe in team members' good intentions when interpreting behaviors.
- We do not usurp someone else's task.
- We communicate without manipulation and malice.
- We work interdependently to accomplish team goals.

Discussion

In the following sections, we discuss each theme with relevant communication ethics, business ethics, and social science scholarly literature to contextualize the findings. By using this multidisciplinary approach, we broaden the discussion of ethical communication in virtual teams.

Theme 1—Care for the Other: Team members demonstrate care for one another.

The theme "Care for the Other" refers to the perception that team members—often working at a distance—genuinely care for one another. This sense of care can help individuals feel less isolated and less vulnerable. Note that the theme is care *for*, not *about*, denoting action. By taking this action, members minimize the dehumanization (Christoff 2014) that can occur within virtual teams. The importance of this theme is reflected in the virtual team members' interviews. One member points out, "Our care for the whole person is what makes this group work, what creates trust and openness, what keeps us going, and what makes it comfortable for us to background our egos and put the group first" (Group Member [GM] 7). Another member indicates, "The care-giving feature of this group is clear and dominant" (GM3). The team describes this theme as foundational to many of the other themes and as what contributes to the team's cohesiveness.

Carol Gilligan's (1982) "ethic of care" is reflective of this ideal. An ethic of care focuses on relational development and mutual understanding. Gilligan contrasts this to Kohlberg's (1976) "ethic of justice," which focuses on impartiality and equity. Applied to online working conditions, Lu (2015) discovered that "virtual team members tend to be more task-oriented and exchange less social-emotional information, which further depletes social rapport . . . Understandably, they consequently report less satisfaction with the group process than do members

of face-to-face teams" (56). In contrast to social distance, thriving interpersonal relationships in small groups are associated with stronger creativity, motivation, morale, decisions (Walther and Burgoon 1992), and strategic adaptability (Carmeli et al. 2016). Lawrence and Maitlis (2012) reflect on how an ethic of care can promote a sense of wholeness within groups through the use of narrative. They argue that "together, these [caring] practices foster an ontology of possibility—a belief system that emphasizes the socially constructed nature of both past and present and, thus, facilitates action and an appreciation of its limits" (641). Theme 1 (Care for the Other) meets a need within virtual teams that helps to compensate for lack of person-to-person contact.

When considering this theme in the context of small group communication, being cared for by other group members contributes to a team's cohesiveness. Cohesion is commonly defined as "a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together" (Cragan et al. 2009, 17) and is often categorized as "social" or "task" cohesion (Chang and Bordia 2001). Further narrowing the concept of how team members perceive cohesion, Bollen and Hoyle (1990) indicate two aspects of social cohesion: the "sense of belonging" and "feelings of morale" (485). The "sense of belonging" is clearly articulated by one group member in this study who reflects, "we have supported each other through tough and good times. We've celebrated people's tenures and promotions, births of babies, and worried about them when they faced personal struggles. We make sure that we catch up with each other when we talk on the phone and when we see each other at [our national conference]" (GM2). This blending of personal and professional communication reflects the findings of Gatti (2021), who investigated the construction of team ethics by examining its online discourse. Gatti's study reveals that "the blurring of private and professional life not only allows for the enactment of ethic-driven discourse strategies that result in enhanced cooperation and improved team performance, but also for high levels of interconnectivity and improved social interaction" (para. 1). Keyton (1999) adds that teams experience cohesiveness as a result of relationships in the group or task components or both. Building a team's cohesion has been found to influence a group's longevity (Bormann, 1990; Keyton, 1999), feelings of satisfaction (Frey and Barge 1997), commitment to the group (Chang and Bordia 2001), and a group's success (Beal et al. 2003). Furthermore, DeRue et al. (2015) found that perceptions of warmth in the group, defined as "feelings of benevolence, liking, trustworthiness" (1193), led to more people taking on informal and formal leadership roles. Care for the Other is thus a gesture of kindness and a pathway to effective, strong group cohesion in both the task and social dimensions.

Theme 2—Commitment: Team members demonstrate commitment to the group and to the group's goals.

Commitment highlights the interdependent nature of a virtual team. The point of being in a group is to work collaboratively toward a goal(s) whose results exceed what an individual could do alone. Effective group members work as an interdependent system, relying on each member to fulfill their own

responsibilities to reach the goal. Small group communication research regarding goals is clear: goals must be effectively communicated to everyone in the group (Adler and Elmhorst 2005).

Janie Harden Fritz's (2016b) work on professional civility and organizational ethics supports the importance of group goals. Her conceptual framework delineates how each sphere of organizational activity depends on communicative action that promotes the productivity and cohesion of workplaces. She describes such communicative acts as regularly articulating a commitment to the group's goals as "committed conversations" that protect organizational citizenship (140). This keeps group members accountable to themselves and one another through the creation and maintenance of professional identities.

This theme highlights how effective and ethical groups not only need goals to be clearly defined, but also require the commitment of each member to achieve shared goals. One member explains, "If we commit to doing something, we do our best to make that happen . . . we are committed to the work, and we have shown our commitment by following through on our promises" (GM5). Another member indicates, "[Our] group members continue to work together due to our commitment to the field of communication ethics, shared interest in researching communication ethics pedagogy, and the camaraderie we share" (GM4). Consistent with the findings of Stewart et al. (2021), commitment, trust, and team accountability surfaced in this group's development. This group shares the researchers' suggestion that "perhaps the strongest proof of the value of team accountability lies in members being keener to continue to collaborate after the end of the project" (13). Communicating commitment to the group and working to achieve shared goals contribute to an effective and ethical team, a critical necessity when the team is virtual.

Hertel, Konradt, and Orlikowski (2004) point out a drawback in virtual teams: "it is often more difficult to implement and maintain common goals when persons are spatially and temporally distributed. Thus, the perceived commitment to team goals might be reduced in virtual teams" (3). Lenz and Machado (2008) indicate that setting, agreeing upon, and achieving goals is important in both face-to-face and virtual teams; however, doing so might be even more important in virtual teams, where trust is more difficult to establish and commitment is more challenging to maintain over time due to time and space distancing. As one member put it, "We are committed to the group; how many other groups are you a part of where members genuinely feel bad if they haven't contributed?!" (GM7).

It is important to note that not only groups have shared goals; members have individual goals as well. The more alignment between the individual and group goals, the better the performance (Bieleke et al. 2017). This alignment is articulated when one group member states, "There is an 'implied' commitment to one another that if someone asks for involvement, we respond . . . Everyone is responsible, another important group trait" (GM3). Commitment to help others with individual goals is noted from another team member:

> We also recognize that people are at different points in their careers . . . if it really matters for someone's professional advancement, we would help that

> person along in terms of author order and other things (recommendation letters, letters of support, etc.). (GM2)

In this group, there is close alignment between group and individual goals and a strong commitment by members in pursuing shared goals. Because the social dimension of a virtual team can be more difficult than the task dimension (Crites et al. 2021), it is important for members to offer a consistent articulation of their commitment to upholding the group goals and each other's individual goals.

Theme 3—Respect: Team members respect each other.

The theme of respect is also essential in team communication and was evident in members' commitment to honor each other's human dignity. One team member describes, "I think we all have a high level of respect for everyone in the group. We are willing to go above and beyond for the other members in the group" (GM6).

A founder of the field of communication ethics and author of the original textbook on human communication ethics, Richard L. Johannesen (2002) views respect as integral to human communication, especially in interpersonal, small group, and public communication. Johannesen elaborates on Karl Wallace's (1955) guidelines for ethical communication in a representative democracy and advances the value of mutual respect, or the "belief in the dignity and worth of the individual" (24). Mutual respect is apparent in how the team valued members' contributions regardless of the stage of their academic careers and scholarly interests. One team member articulated an observation that the others agreed with: "We are all different and distinct, bringing our own set of experiences and expertise. And we respect those differences. Our team works because we have different ways of looking at the same thing, and we respect the levels of experience, research commitments, and perspectives we bring" (GM7). This approach not only imbues respect; it is also a catalyst where care for the Other emerges organically (Theme 1).

Current scholarship differentiates between two types of respect (Grover 2014). Recognition respect is grounded in others' humanity and rights, whereas appraisal respect is afforded to others in response to their individual characteristics (34). In the team, both types of respect were evident. Recognition respect occurred throughout the process of working together by team members consistently communicating with one another about shared projects. Appraisal respect was apparent when team members appreciated each other's professional strengths and intentionally learned about others' goals, skill sets, and previous work.

Johannesen (2002) highlights the importance of cultivating virtues like respect in his discussion of White and Wallace's model of organizational integrity. White and Wallace outline habits, ethical commitments, and practices to develop these virtues. The habit of interacting responsibly demonstrates respect for others' views and endeavors to build trust in organizational groups. By practicing the virtues of communication, the team grew in their respect for the human dignity of

the other. For example, a member acknowledges the positive role of respect: "We respect and value multiple perspectives because our goal is to have the best outcome possible" (GM1).

Examining the relationship between respect and learning, Edmondson (2002) claims that respect is vital in a team's communication for interpersonal risk-taking and psychological safety. Psychological safety, members' perception that the team is a secure environment to take interpersonal risks, is essential for learning to occur naturally in a team. It allows team members to acknowledge mistakes, request feedback, and work together to find solutions. Psychological safety is a catalyst for teams to engage in conflict that results in positive outcomes such as increased innovation (Deng et al. 2021). Respect, psychological safety, and learning were evident in the team: "I was able to find a home in a division [of a professional organization] that welcomed new scholars into research opportunities. I still feel like a student LEARNING from everyone in the group" (GM6). This statement reveals learning and psychological safety because members on the team respect each other.

The social science research regarding respect in teams is consistent with our findings. Virtual teams encounter demanding situations of technological constraints and needs (Robey et al. 2000), a lack of connection (Rice-Bailey 2014), and isolation (Larbi and Springfield 2004). Researchers of effectual teams discovered the importance of respect and psychological safety (Edmondson 2002), self-discipline (Larbi and Springfield 2004), and communication practices (Robey et al. 2000) to address these challenges. This study's research team found that when they honored the human dignity of each member and valued members' perspectives and expertise, their respect for each other deepened, and they more effectively achieved their goals.

Theme 4—Adaptability: Team members are adaptable and share leadership.

Virtual teams can be described as controlled chaos with multiple time zones, varied skill sets, and different languages, cultures, and physical contexts. Theme 4, "Adaptability," then, is essential. Priest et al. (2002) define adaptability as "the utilization of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable members to recognize deviations from expected action and then readjust actions" (562). The compelling aspect of virtual teams is that they are not constrained by a physical location or time zone. Horwitz, Bravington, and Silvis (2006) state, "A virtual team is an easily adaptable entity into which processes and people with new skills can be deployed as required" (473–74). One group member described examples of this type of adaptation:

> When a fire destroyed a team member's home, when another team member's parent died, and when still another team member's mother faced emergency surgery, the others provided words of encouragement through personal emails and group chats. They gave grace to one another, paused deadlines, and readjusted work duties to allow those who needed it to attend to personal affairs without being shamed. (GM1)

In these instances, the group addressed the wellbeing of the individuals and maintained the group process.

Social science literature reveals shared leadership as a key feature of adaptability. Shared leadership, defined by Wang, Waldman, and Zhang (2013), is "an emergent team property of mutual influence and shared responsibility among team members, whereby they lead each other toward goal achievement" (181). The researched team often demonstrates the properties of shared leadership. One member explains: "Usually in groups this is a dominant conversation: who leads? Who gets first author? Who is dominant? . . . That being said, in this group leadership tends to coalesce around ideas" (GM7).

Shared leadership is demonstrated as well when team members shift roles. This supports DeRue's (2011) Adaptive Leadership Theory, which posits that the "leading-following process is fluid such that actors can be leading and/or following at different points in time" (131). One of the members recalls: "In terms of leadership, the majority of members have taken leadership roles at different times depending on the project and our areas of expertise" (GM4).

Shared leadership in teams is enhanced by leader humility. Chiu, Owens, and Tesluk (2016) define humility as "a willingness to see oneself accurately, acknowledgement of the strengths and contributions of others, and openness to new ideas and feedback" (1708). Based on a meta-analysis of shared leadership studies, Wang, Waldman and Zhang (2013) believe that

> by sharing leadership roles in a team, members work toward a common goal and lead each other's behaviors. These activities may, in turn, generate trust toward each other and enhance cooperation and cohesion . . . In this way, team processes and the emergent states resulting from shared leadership may subsequently result in higher levels of team performance. (191)

Research specific to virtual teams supports this assertion. Hoegl and Muethel (2016) indicate that "team leaders tend to underestimate the team members' capacity to lead themselves . . . preventing the team members from unfolding their true potential. Paradoxically, it is the team leaders themselves hindering leadership effectiveness in virtual teams" (7). Adaptability is evident in the researched team's shared leadership and contributes to the productivity of virtual teams.

Theme 5—Authenticity

Business ethics scholars have called authenticity a "necessary starting point for ethics" (Freeman and Auster 2011, 99). Contemporary scholarship in group communication also supports the idea that authenticity, a type of social honesty, is important for the success of a team. Emmerich et al. (2019) note:

> Authentic self-expression means individuals act in accordance with their values, preferences, and needs and that they are open in their relationships (e.g., disclose personal information, including potential weaknesses, and

> negative traits). Notably, self knowledge is proposed to be a prerequisite for authentic self expression. (178–79)

Further, when people perceive their coworkers as authentic, it "positively affects [the] employees' own well-being [and] the well-being of their teammates" (192).

Authenticity is also associated with "authentic leadership," defined as leaders who "act in accordance with deep personal values and convictions, to build credibility and win the respect and trust of followers" (Avolio et al. 2004, 806). The research indicates that authentic leadership positively influences their followers. Authentic leadership has been tied to followers' lower propensity to engage in unethical behavior (Tang and Liu 2012), greater organizational commitment and worker performance (Leroy et al. 2012), and increased optimism and trust (Stander et al. 2015).

The counterpart to authentic leadership is authentic followership. Crawford et al. (2018) describe authentic followers as individuals who, "through their capacity for authenticity and positive organizational engagement, are self-managing and follow leaders with whom they share values" (274). Authentic followership has been linked to increased organizational commitment (Leung et al. 2018), job satisfaction (Gardner and Avoli 2005), and creativity (Wang and Liang 2020; Jing et al. 2021).

The idea of being an authentic follower and leader seems even more pertinent in groups who participate in a "shared leadership" structure similar to the structure of this research team. As previously stated in Theme 4 on adaptability, shared leadership values mutual influence and responsibility for the organization's goals (Wang, Waldman and Jhang 2013). This type of structure is increasing in organizations (Avolio et al. 2009) and within virtual teams (Han et al. 2021). Studies in the social sciences and business research report the benefit of shared leadership in virtual teams over the traditional structure (Drescher and Garbers 2016; Hoch and Kozlowski 2014). Connecting shared leadership with authentic followership and leadership changes the traditional perspective of a leader's influence on followers to one of mutual influence.

The significance of authenticity, reflected in authentic leadership and followership as well as shared leadership, is evident within the research group. When asked to describe the communication of the group, one member wrote, "honesty, vulnerability, transparency" (GM7), and another indicated that the group was "open and honest" (GM6). Another aspect of authenticity is the freedom to be oneself with the group. Reflecting upon what it was like to be a member of the team, one member states, "This group allows me to be more of my authentic self" (GM1). Authenticity contributed to the success of a virtual team through members' openness and honesty with one another.

Theme 6—Valuing the Other: Team members like and value each other.

The defining characteristics of the theme "Valuing the Other" are acknowledgement and friendship. A key aspect of demonstrating that you like and value someone is by acknowledging their work, questions, expertise, lived

experience, and differing perspectives. As Hyde (2006) notes, "Acknowledgement is a conscious act of creation that marks an origin, a beginning, an opening in space-time where people can feel at home as they dwell, deliberate, and know together" (10, emphasis removed). Hyde asserts that negative communication is also a form of acknowledgement and that all acknowledgement does not have to be positive. But when there is no acknowledgement, negative or positive, it can lead to a social death. For Hyde, acknowledgment is tied to a call of conscience, which is the intrinsic motivation to do the right thing not only for oneself but (perhaps first) for the other, whether we "like" the other or not. This takes courage. Team members, as conscience-oriented thinkers (Arnett 1986), begin from a position of valuing the other first as a prerequisite for doing their work, even during times of escalating conflict. In other research, Walther and Bunz (2005) found that "people liked working with one another to a greater extent due to affectionate-oriented than due to task-oriented communication" (840). Thus, people who like each other tend to perform better, provided other task expectations are met, such as meeting deadlines and being forthright in communication. As one team member reports: "I consider the people in this group my friends, people I can ask questions of, seek advice from, and talk through serious issues" (GM3). Another person notes, "I also tell people that I feel blessed to be a part of it. I really like and respect the other members" (GM1).

While some researchers question the value of friendship in relation to the productivity of groups, a meta-analysis of 26 studies about friendship in groups and group performance by Chung et al. (2018) found a small but significant relationship between the variables. They found that friendship was more important in groups of three to nine members, which is reflective of this project's research team.

Friendship is also discussed in the context of professional ethics and civility by Fritz (2016b), who says, "Human beings are social creatures; to be fully human, we need friends, groups of others with whom we can gather, and meaningful activity that engages our talents and abilities in worthwhile pursuits" (26). For example, one team member summarized their experience of our group: "The story I tell of our group also includes how we enjoy working together" (GM4). An interesting feature of Fritz's concept of friendship as it relates to professional ethics is how she positions "public friendships" to guard against the tendency by some professionals to look at coworkers as family. She bases her critique on the complications that arise when viewing coworkers as family because we generally expect family to tolerate behaviors that coworkers and supervisors would not. According to Fritz, coworkers should be spared the expectation of tolerating uncivil behavior, and it is more productive to view coworkers as "public friends" as a way to keep the focus on the shared goals of the group as opposed to personal matters. A public friend, however, as the name implies, is still a friend. A friend is someone whose humanity we recognize and respect and who we see as more than simply a means to an end. The key, suggests Fritz, is to cultivate public friendships in a way that promotes the well-being of professionals without turning the workplace into our personal spheres.

Tse and Dasborough (2008) found that communication about both tasks and relationships is important for team member exchanges (TMX); they point out that high quality team member exchanges are related to higher levels of performance. Their study notes that "workplace friendship may play a vital role in determining the quality of TMX" (210). The connection between task and relationship is exemplified by these team members' quotes:

> I stay in this group because it's connected closely to my work, and it doesn't require too much of me beyond what I would want to do anyway. And, as I said previously, "I love these guys!" (GM3)

> What I like about this group is that the things I like about myself are mirrored and augmented in this group. . . . I love this group not because I feel unique in it but because they feel like kin. They feel like kindred spirits. (GM5)

As these quotes demonstrate, members value each other through public friendship and acknowledgment, which strengthened their relationships and the team.

Theme 7—Trust: Team members exhibit and reinforce actions that inspire trust.

The final theme of "Trust" can be viewed as a culmination of the previous six themes that act in combination to embolden team members' choices to work together. A health communication perspective defines trust as "a willingness to be vulnerable, a feeling of being well taken care of, and knowing promises will be kept" (Scott et al. 2009, 2). This perspective, applied to Themes 1 to 6, allows insights into their cumulative effects: "willingness to be vulnerable" can be seen within the themes of adaptability (Theme 4) and authenticity (Theme 5). A team member's "feeling well taken care of" can develop through themes of care (Theme 1) and the value of each person (Theme 6). Finally, a team member "knowing promises will be kept" is established through commitment (Theme 2) and respect (Theme 3). Therefore, all the themes combined allow trust to be built and nurtured within a virtual team.

Martin Buber's (1923/1970) I–Thou communication encapsulates the underpinnings of trust and the other themes as well. I–Thou communication, found through dialogue, seeks mutual understanding. This interaction is contrasted with I–It communication, where the person is perceived as an object or a means to an end. It is within Buber's I–Thou dialogue that the other team members are perceived as whole persons whose worth is found by simply being human—not by their usefulness. Buber's I–It interaction is helpful in transactional situations needed to complete a straightforward task such as buying a cup of coffee. However, it is not helpful in long-term, interdependent relationships such as virtual teams. If a team member feels taken for granted, mistreated, or replaceable, then mistrust grows among team members. For Buber, "in mistrust one presupposes that the other is likewise filled with mistrust, leading to a dangerous reserve and lack of candor" (Scott n.d. , §2.f, para. 1). I–Thou communication allows members to know they are valued (Theme 6), cared for (Theme 1), and respected (Theme 3), which makes it possible for them to be

committed (Theme 2), adaptable (Theme 4), and authentic (Theme 5) within the team—all of which initiate and sustain trust.

Genuine dialogue cannot be forced, but when team members focus on understanding issues related to the team and learning from each other, dialogic moments can occur. Arnett (2015) asserts that not all is lost with I–It communication, as the I–It holds the potential for I–Thou communication. In addition, technical dialogue, or the sharing of information (Fritz et al. 2023), keeps the relationships among group members steady. The research team experienced the benefits of technical dialogue as they valued the uniqueness of the other, continued to learn from each other, and remained open to dialogic moments that emerged between members. For example, one member wrote, "I can't imagine anyone in this group saying 'no' to a request for support. . . . We know about one another's troubles and joys (divorce, promotions, physical ailments, marriage, travel, caretaking, births, etc.), which adds depth to the group" (GM3).

Some scholars point to the role of trust as central to the effectiveness of face-to-face and virtual teams (Gera 2013; Morrison-Smith and Ruiz 2020). Lusher, Kremer, and Robins (2014) confirm cooperative and competitive structures of trust relations in teams and demonstrate that the most effective teams also avoid trust-inhibiting patterns. Focusing on how leaders cultivate trust in teams, Roussin (2008) found that leaders increase trust, psychological safety, and team performance when they cultivate dyadic relationships with team members outside of the small group context. By contrast, Aubert and Kelsey's (2003) study of local and virtual sub-teams reveals that trust levels did not influence team performance until the final stage of work together when sub-teams with higher levels of trust were more successful on their project. They also found that ability and integrity are necessary for trust on virtual teams. In this study, trust can be seen to contribute to the effectiveness of the virtual team. One team member summarizes the importance of trust in both the task and social dimensions:

> Trust is also reflected in the support that has been offered [in addition to the] academic tasks by notes on email, contributions of money (following a personal tragedy), and letters of support for promotion and tenure. I think all these actions communicate "I've got your back" not just for professional reasons, but also for personal ones. (GM4)

Trust is built over time through consistent behaviors (as articulated in Themes 1–6), which indicate to team members that they are holistically valued as human beings, rather than being just a means to an end.

The discussion of the themes (care, commitment, respect, adaptability, authenticity, valuing the other, and trust) reveals the value of a multidisciplinary approach to understanding virtual teams. The disciplines of communication ethics, business ethics, and the social sciences have different perspectives and provide clarity of the phenomenon we are investigating. As a result, this article offers academics and practitioners insights into virtual teams.

Conclusion

This qualitative study investigated the ethical and behavioral practices of a flourishing long-term virtual team. Our findings contribute to an understanding of the communicative behaviors that support the virtual team's communication. The principles include care, commitment, respect, adaptability, authenticity, valuing each person, and trust. The Credo delineates values and behaviors that have the potential to strengthen teams and increase performance.

Strengths and Limitations

The specific characteristics of the virtual team studied can be viewed as a strength and limitation. The fact that this team had been working together for over a decade allowed the team to resolve many problems associated with group work. The length of time influences this group's discussion, but that will differ for newly formed groups. Additionally, all its members are trained in communication and communication ethics, providing them with insights into how to work together effectively. This expertise, albeit a strength, also distinguishes this group from a typical team where there may be varying degrees of expertise in group processes or communication ethics. This team also differs from typical groups in that they are connected by membership to a professional organization, but employed by different organizations and choose to voluntarily remain in the group. However, this group brings material and social rewards to its members in terms of publications and belonging. By using their expertise to evaluate themselves, they are able to provide insights and guidance about virtual group work.

As with any self-study research, there is methodological strength in developing a rich analysis as well as a limitation in its possible bias. Although the findings of this article cannot be generalized to all small groups, the Credo can be used by virtual teams to discuss their own ethical principles and behaviors. Another factor is that this group initially met face-to-face for two hours at a national conference prior to becoming a virtual team and annually after becoming a virtual team. Research indicates that teams are more successful, especially in the beginning, if they meet face to face to get to know each other (Hinds and Bailey 2003). This article supports that assertion and recommends policies and procedures for groups to participate in this best practice for virtual teams.

Recommendations for Future Research

The qualitative "bottom-up" approach to this study allows for many possible extensions of this research. We recommend future studies investigate its generalizability to other virtual teams and face-to-face teams. Generalizability studies should include different types of virtual teams, such as autonomous vs. dependent groups, culturally heterogeneous vs. homogeneous groups, and groups of different sizes and demographic characteristics. Future studies could also consider the themes and statements from the Credo independently in either experimental or bona fide groups. Investigating the bona fide perspective,

examining real, situated groups, either face-to-face or virtual (Hirokawa 1996), is particularly meaningful for ethical communication in groups because members have the potential to influence others' careers and lives in substantial ways (Stephenson et al. 2016). For instance, an interesting line of research would be to investigate the first theme of this study, Care for the Other, as it relates to Christoff's (2014) notion of "dehumanization" within organizational contexts.

Application

Credos shape organizational culture (Bagyo et al. 2022) by encapsulating an organization's beliefs and core values (Engleberg 2004). With an increase of organizations conducting virtual work, credos need to address the uniqueness of a virtual context. The Credo for Ethical Communication in Virtual Teams can be used as a guide for teams. Members of existing virtual teams could evaluate their current team based on the principles reflected in the Credo, or it can be used in the formation of teams to initiate a positive online culture.

Summary

This paper discusses multiple factors that contribute to challenges in virtual teamwork. Application of the Credo for Ethical Communication in Virtual Teams addresses these challenges by enabling long-term virtual teams to enhance ethical communicative behaviors that promote task effectiveness, relational satisfaction, and team viability, thereby highlighting the practical value of ethical communication guidelines for digitally mediated collaboration.

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Textual Dialogue and the Complexities of Ethical Relationality in the Praxis of Research Scholarship

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Abstract: This essay examines the ethical possibilities and challenges of engaging in scholarly dialogue with textual others in the context of academic research writing. Drawing on the work of Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Paul Ricoeur, I consider how scholarly writers in the humanities and social sciences are invited to participate in an ethics of alterity to *textual otherness*—to encounter, interpret, and interact with research texts as a *Thou* and to respond to the voices of other scholars as human traces conveyed therein. Such an ethics of alterity is often eclipsed, however, by the institutional pressures, publishing dictates, monologic discourse, and disciplinary rhetoric with which scholarly writers must contend in the academy. These tensions complicate but also necessitate the importance of developing a dialogic ethics for textual relationality that not only supports genuinely interhuman scholarship but also has pedagogical implications for students learning the "how" and "why" of academic research writing.

Keywords: ethics of alterity; ethical relationality; attentive receptivity; answerability; responsibility; research scholarship; textual dialogue

One of the questions that has concerned me in the context of scholarly discourse and research composition is how to relate and communicate with other scholars ethically so that our textual interactions are mutually beneficial and the knowledge built between us can promote the common good. I first came to this question while teaching research composition courses to first-year university students a number of years ago. I was introducing students to the technical how-tos of writing a research paper, helping them compose their work within the formal dictates of the genre and the scholarly expectations of humanities and social science disciplines. However, I was struggling to inspire students to generate real questions about their subject matter, engage responsibly with the work of other researchers, and participate in the research interactions they were reading with their own voice and stance.

Beset by these difficulties, I was drawn to the influential composition textbook, *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (2010) by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. In it, they propose that writing be seen as a

"social, conversation act" (xvi) and show how academic composition in the humanities and social sciences follows certain "moves" in a clear dialogic pattern of *response* (others say) and *address* (I say) in its textual structure (3–4). Because scholars are already situated in a particular research community before joining an academic conversation, they do not come to their ideas in a vacuum, but relationally, in response to the words and ideas of others (Gadamer 1985, 181; Clark and Holquist 1984, 245). By extension, scholars then write "in relation and response to the work of other scholars" as they assert their particular stance and as they analyze the research content and come to their conclusions (Stumm 2021, 8).

Drawing on this framework in my composition classes, I invited students to practice "joining the dialogue" with their own inquiry, budding research, and stance, and to structure their work as a written scholarly conversation in their areas of interest and study (Stumm 2021). To my relief, the students took to this approach and benefited from the many templates that Graff and Birkenstein provided as they began to learn the "moves" of response and address to others that matter in academic research writing. It soon became apparent to me, however, that while a dialogic methodology was helping students understand how research compositions are structured, it didn't really address *why it matters* that scholars write in a dialogic way. In seeking this "why," I began to look at the relational and ethical underpinnings of written scholarship—the way scholars relate dialogically with each other that signal an interhuman connection taking place at the heart of our research interactions.

If research composition is a relational practice, then how we relate to one another within that practice matters. If this relational practice is dialogic in nature, then how we respond to and address other researchers in our writing is, to my mind, an ethical question. It inquires "what is good for human beings to be and to do" in this particular communication context (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010, 112). From this standpoint, written research dialogue can be seen as both a dialogic practice of address and response between people in a particular community and an ethical way of relating with one another within that practice of communication (Stumm 2021, 8). Given this shift in my own focus, I began to teach students how to encounter research in an ethical and meaningful way, not just as a storehouse of information to be taken and used, but as *people relating to people* through the textual discourse—a dynamic, interactive, and dialogic process between scholars in a community passionate about a particular subject.

In the best-case scenario, academic writing can be seen as a textual medium through which scholars "meet" and relate meaningfully to one another in a generative way, a genuine dialogue that "allows for changing and being changed" (Buber 1958, 12; Cissna and Anderson 1994, 10). Martin Buber calls this an *I–Thou* relation (1958). When we truly "meet" another as a "Thou," we open ourselves to difference or *otherness* in our relationship with attentive receptivity and engaged response, inviting genuine dialogue to emerge between us. This openness toward otherness suggests an ethics of alterity at the heart of genuine dialogue, in which a real encounter with something *wholly other* summons our response and responsibility toward those others whom we meet (Buber 1958, [1947] 2002;

Levinas 1985, 1993, 1998; Atterton, Calarco, and Friedman 2004; Lipari 2004, 2012; Arnett 2003, 2004, 2012).

While Buber is referring to meeting the other in proximate, interpersonal relationships, Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) extends this "meeting" beyond face-to-face interactions to genuine encounters with the written word (75–76). The ethics of alterity that shapes our interpersonal relations, then, can be adopted in and adapted for our textual relations. In academic scholarship in particular, textual "meeting" begins with a receptive listening posture of openness toward otherness in our research practices—reading attentively, reflectively, and discerningly as we interpret one another's work. In the process, we may experience a "meeting of the minds," where we feel truly engaged and inspired by another's discoveries and ideas, encountering new ways of seeing things and coming to understand the subject matter, ourselves, or others differently (Stumm 2021, 8). As we write, we enter the academic conversation with a posture of responsive and responsible agency, acknowledging the other scholars in the conversation and representing their work faithfully as we assert our own perspectives and particular stance. As we reciprocally respond to the research of others with our own insights, we "[conjoin] a new discourse to the discourse of the text," as Paul Ricoeur (1981) puts it, which in turn invites further discussion and fosters additional expressions of "conjunction and renewal" in our research community (158).

At the same time, however, academic writing is a highly-mediated discourse that complicates an ethical praxis of genuine engagement between scholarly writers. Because scholarly interlocutors are not proximate with each other in their acts of reading and response, the discourse of the research text must do the work of bridging the gap between them. On the one hand, this "between" space is dynamic with ethical possibility. Gaps and spaces between scholars create a necessary openness for interpretive flexibility and respect for difference that is crucial for dialogic interactions to emerge in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010; Mancino 2024). On the other hand, this "between" space is rife with ethical complications. Without relational proximity, readers are apt to neglect or forget the very human "trace of the other" within and beyond the text (Üçok-Sayrak, Fritz, and Majocha 2024) and engage with the research solely as an "It" or an object of knowledge to use for their own purposes (Buber [1947] 2002; Stumm 2021). In the process, readers can over-privilege their individual subjectivity in their interpretations and research stance, diminishing the role of other thinkers in the scholarly dialogue and challenging the possibility for genuine dialogic exchange (Arnett 2024, 15).

That said, attempting to bridge the gap with established rules for academic discourse, compositional constraints, and publishing dictates can equally diminish interhuman connection and dialogic interaction between scholarly interlocutors. These closures create useful containers for interpretative practice and conserve the scholarly rigor and necessary rules of the genre (Mancino 2024, 55), but research texts can become relationally static in the process, a tome to objectivity and detachment in the quest for quality scholarship (Nevo 2013, 268–70). Here we face another "It" of research writing that remains intact across the disciplines: research writing is preserved as a monologic discourse, which can obscure the research

interlocutors themselves and the subjectivity and bias they necessarily bring to the process of knowledge development and dissemination (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010, 120–21).

In this article, then, I circle the dialogic space between scholarly authors, readers, and texts, reflecting on the ethical possibilities and complexities that emerge in the praxis of research composition. As I see it, dialogic ethics invites a twofold inquiry of relationality in this context: (a) How might we encounter a research text ethically, as a dialogic interaction with a *Thou* alongside its discursive *It* status as information to use? and (b) How might we encounter the scholars whose work we engage with ethically, given that we are relating in a mediated and textual way in our research practices? In short, what kind of "meeting" and meaningful relation is possible over a research text and what dialogic complications and ethical challenges emerge in the process of such mediated relationality? In this inquiry, I draw principally on the work of Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Paul Ricoeur to flesh out a dialogic ethics for research scholarship and I propose that the textual space "between" scholars both invites and impedes its praxis. Instead of forging a middle ground that mollifies these tensions, I contend that navigating between them is the necessary and inevitable task of academic writers as they seek to encounter and engage with each other's work in dialogic and ethical ways.

Navigating the Intersecting Discourses of Research Composition

In considering how to engage ethically with research texts, scholarly readers and writers must first of all recognize the tensions that emerge between its monologic and dialogic discourses, as they inform the kind of relationships and interactions that occur in and through the text. As a *genre*, research writing is meant to build knowledge and understanding about a certain subject in a particular research community. As a *practice*, research writing invites scholars to share discoveries and shed new light on long-held notions, learning from each other and building on each other's work in the process. While the practice of reading and writing research texts tends to be dialogical, the genre of research writing is typically monologic in its communication of research knowledge. This double discourse can complicate our ability to engage in *genuine dialogue* with other scholars across texts, even as it invites thoughtful research interactions with the knowledge being conveyed.

Buber describes genuine dialogue as a whole-being encounter and wholly present relation with an *other* as a *Thou* ([1947] 2002, 22; 1958, 4–5). In genuine dialogue, we meet others without agenda or expectation and, as such, become momentarily open to encounter their unique expression of being and discover the revelatory insights that occur unbidden and unexpectedly between us (Arnett 2022, 199). This encounter with otherness happens most often in proximate, face-to-face human interactions but it can also occur in our encounters with the natural world, in divine revelation, in our research discoveries, and in our reading

practices (Buber 1958, 6). It occurs when we suddenly see something in its immediacy and full presence, free from our preconceived notions about it or the ways we envision using it (Buber 1958, 40–42). These moments take us off guard, surprise us, and put us in direct relation with something entirely different from ourselves, which becomes a powerful basis for learning and a means by which we shift our perspectives and develop our understanding (Arnett 2011).

As a textual product of knowledge, however, research writing is typically not encountered as a *Thou* but experienced as an "*It*"—a monologic source of information about a certain subject matter that has been confirmed by reputable scholars. Drawing on Buber's work, Arnett, Bell, and Fritz (2010) describe monologic communication as a way "to state what we know" (120). Buber (1958) puts it this way: "Being is disclosed to the man who is engaged in knowing, as he looks at what is over against him. He will, indeed, have to grasp as an object that which he has seen with the force of presence, he will have to compare it with objects, establish it in its order among classes of objects, describe and analyze it objectively. Only as *It* can it enter the structure of knowledge" (40). While such objectivity maintains a high standard for research knowledge in the academic community as a whole, scholarly authors can be effaced in the process (Ricoeur 1981, 152)—their human subjectivity and relational interconnectedness in the community sidelined by the text—and the revelatory potential of genuine dialogue all but obscured.

While some fields of research directly affirm the authorial *other*, other disciplines enact authorial erasure in order to maintain a sense of scholarly detachment, a means to let the information "speak for itself," as it were. The "I" doing the research and writing is eclipsed by the "It" of the research text. And while many scholarly voices are acknowledged and cited for their research merit, the authors themselves often remain unseen beyond their signature, their subjectivity and alterity concealed. This absence can lead to relational closures in the praxis of research composition. Because scholars are not proximate to each other or share an immediate context in their written research interactions, the relational space between them where textual "meeting" may occur (Buber [1947] 2002, Bakhtin 1984, Arnett 1986, 2004; Mancino 2024) is also one where interlocution is highly mediated and dialogically fraught (Ricoeur 1981, 148). As Ricoeur (1981) puts it, "The book divides the act of writing and the act of reading into two sides, between which there is no communication. The reader is absent from the act of writing; the writer is absent from the act of reading. The text thus produces a double eclipse of the reader and the writer. It thereby replaces the relation of dialogue, which directly connects the voice of one to the hearing of the other" (146–47). Academic scholarship appears to reinforce this "double eclipse" in its research discourse, magnifying relational absence and personal detachment for the sake of objectivity in research texts and limiting the potential of genuine dialogue to emerge.

A tension thus exists at the heart of scholarly knowledge production. On the one hand, very real, subjective, biased, and situated scholars are authoring research texts and engaging with the voices of other very real scholars in the process. The texts are thus "signs of another mental life" (or many other mental

lives) existing *outside* of the research content and shaping its knowledge, rather than simply objective records of the research itself (Ricoeur 1981, 150). On the other hand, the genre of research writing demands objectivity and authorial detachment to present research knowledge as factual and impartial, so that it is deemed reliable and trustworthy in the scholarly community. While scholars do have the capacity to be wholly present to the research texts they read and write, co-constructing meaning with other scholars through their written discourse (Arnett 2004, 79), the focus of those textual dialogues tends to be the knowledge of things being recorded—the objectified content of research findings and ideas. As a result, Ricoeur observes, "the text has no outside but only an inside" (153), a record of research knowledge distinct from the scholar's genuine experience of discovery, nuanced relational contexts, and rich mental life outside of and informing the scholarly text.

The way scholars share knowledge in research writing, then, typically takes the form of a "technical dialogue" (Buber [1947] 2002), where they "exchange information" about what they see and know and share their understanding of the subject matter (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010, 120). Technical dialogue is helpful for knowledge production and dissemination, as well as for expanding understanding as scholars exchange information about their views, theories, and conclusions. In fact, technical dialogue is arguably the most common form of interpersonal exchange both inside and outside the academy. As Arnett, Bell, and Fritz observe, "Most of life rests in the realm of technical dialogue, attending to the complexity of images of self and Other in informative exchange" (120). In the technical dialogue of scholarship, however, we must take our genuine "Aha!" moments of discovery and the dynamic interplay of ideas we have drawn from the scholarly community and fix them in the formulated phrase of academic speech and structure—what Emmanuel Levinas (1998) calls "the *said*" of a system of thought.

And yet, research composition does reveal revelatory glimpses and possibilities of genuine dialogue in Buber's sense of the term: as an *I–Thou* relation in its concrete uniqueness and its opening toward alterity in mutual meeting (Arnett 2022, 199; Buber [1947] 2002, 22). While technical dialogue may well be the main discourse modality that scholars use to convey their research knowledge and learning, there are moments where genuine dialogue breaks through with an insight that springs forth "as a by-product of the interaction" and creates unexpected resonance within and beyond the research content and context (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010, 120). In genuine dialogue, the words of the text are brought out of the past—as a "dead thing" or "the said" of an established system of thought (Bakhtin 1984, 285; Levinas 1998)—and into the present living moment as a textual voice of epiphany or revelation. In this moment, the text "opens onto other things," Ricoeur (1981) observes, as scholars share what they have discovered in intertextual or extra-textual dialogue, giving textual voices further reach and a myriad of new contexts in which to speak and find meaning (158).

What we see in research scholarship, then, is an interplay between the monologism of research texts, the technical dialogue of learning and knowledge dissemination, and the genuine dialogue that unexpectedly emerges in

interpretative reading and compositional practices, which become revelatory insights for scholars to explore and share. As Arnett, Bell, and Fritz (2010) observe, all three forms of discourse are necessarily part of our communication interactions. In fact, Arnett (2011) proposes that "the 'I–It' relationship . . . actually makes dialogue possible" in that it creates the basis for our relationality and the context for genuine dialogue to break through (51). We do not have the capacity to relate and learn in a perpetually open, wholly present, spontaneous, and revelatory way, nor can we demand it of others (51). Instead, scholars are invited to "meet the Other" who appears in and through the multiple, overlapping discourses of research composition and navigate the mediated space between these discourses in receptive and responsive ways (51).

This navigation becomes one of the primary ethical tasks of researchers in their scholarly communication. An ethics of receptivity and response to the other is invited by every written word, but it is also challenged by textual mediations, scholarly expectations, readerly impulses to utilize scholarship rather than join its dialogue, and the "monologism of thinking" that typifies the human and natural sciences (Friedman 2002, 363). Given that research writing is both a textual *product* of research and a compositional *process* of scholarly exchange—*a thing* and *an act*—its monologic and dialogic aspects continually intersect and undermine any possibility of engaging with research texts in a single discursive way. As readers and writers of scholarly texts, we oscillate between taking research material as information to be used for our own purposes, and encountering research material as a dialogue between scholars that inspires us to participate in its reciprocal exchange. As a result, we are often challenged in our ability to engage in ethically receptive and responsive ways in our research practices because we are unclear about whether we are interacting with things or with people, with monologic information or a dynamic, interhuman dialogue between scholars.

What seems to be in question, then, is to what extent scholars can enact an ethics of receptivity and responsibility to a *textual other*, to encounter, interpret, and interact with research texts as a *Thou* and to respond to the voices of others conveyed as human traces within the written text (Üçok-Sayrak, Fritz, and Majocha 2024, 2)? Given the complexity of this question, I want to consider these two postures—attentive receptivity and generative response, as well as the pivotal act of interpretation that conjoins them—in detail, as they each suggest an ethically dialogic way to approach research texts and genuinely encounter the voices therein, but are also fraught with complications in the praxis of written research communication.

A Reading Posture: Attentive Receptivity and the Appropriative Act of Interpretation

Being attentively receptive to a research text is one of the key postures for ethical reading praxis in a scholarly context (Stumm 2021). Attentive receptivity involves an open, mindful, and generous orientation to the text *as other* and to the voices *of others* in the text in one's reading practice (Üçok-Sayrak, Fritz, and Majocha 2024,

2). Donning an "open-minded" posture toward the otherness of the text—what Ricoeur (1981) calls "the world of the work" (178)—and the scholarly voices conveyed therein involves a willingness to listen and to learn, "welcoming unfamiliar ideas with interest and curiosity" rather than indifference, cynicism, or hostility (Stumm 2021, 26). Attentive receptivity can thus be seen an initiatory posture of listening that creates the space for otherness by which genuine responsivity and dialogic exchange can ensue (Lipari 2012, Arnett 2019).

For Lisbeth Lipari (2012), listening to the words of another "enacts an infinite surplus of welcoming invitation and reception, no matter what is said or heard" (237). She elaborates as follows: "In listening, I create a space to receive you, letting your speech enter me, flow through me" (237). In creating "a dwelling space to receive the alterity of the other, and let it resonate," as Lipari describes it, listening invokes an attentive posture of reception that opens to the words of another with generous hospitality (237). Drawing on the phenomenological ethics of Emmanuel Levinas, Lipari points to a phrase that he uses to signify a wholly open orientation toward the alterity of another: "Here I am" (238). In the Jewish religious tradition, "Here I am," or *hineni* (in Hebrew), signifies a posture of radical receptivity and submission to the summons of God—an infinite *Other* or *Thou* who is wholly separate from and exterior to oneself (Ricoeur 1992, 336). For Levinas (1985), "Here I am" is a receptive response to divine Otherness that extends to the otherness of other people, the divine trace of God or *Thou* in the face of each person one meets (105–6). Such a "Here I am" orientation toward the other is *both* a passive posture of receptivity that bears witness to the alterity of another person without the impulse to subsume that otherness into oneself (Levinas 1998, 145), *and* a self-assignation of submission and responsibility toward the other who summons one's response (142).

Lipari (2012) invokes this expression in the context of rhetoric and dialogue, suggesting that "Here I am" signals "a posture of openness—a readiness to listen to the other who is at once hidden and about to be revealed" (238). I am drawn to Lipari's interpretation of "Here I am" as an ethical posture of receptivity because it extends fruitfully to the context of scholarly reading, where authors and other researchers are "hidden" from view and obscured by monological research discourse, revealed only as traces in the text (through quotation and citation). In our reading praxis, we are not proximate or face-to-face with others, but concretely alone with the research text, distanced from its authors and doubly-distanced from the scholars cited in their work. While we may well be informed by multiple co-present dialogues resonating in our minds as we approach a research text (Arnett 2022, 198), in our particular moment of textual encounter, we do not directly see the others with whom we relate, nor do we share their concrete context. We only have their words. The ethical call of attentive receptivity to otherness thus becomes more urgent as a result. Because we are hidden from each other, mediated by the text between us, we can easily slide into seeing what we want in the words of others, ignoring what does not fit our views, criticizing what we do not like, or taking what we do like—heedless of alterity.

A "Here I am" orientation in the act of scholarly reading thus suggests a locative being-fully-present (*I am here*) to the text, attentively listening to the world

of the work and the voices of other scholars who are hidden from view but nonetheless revealed in the textual traces of the research content. When we inhabit a "Here I am" posture, we bear witness to textual alterity with generosity and care *before* following the ego-impulse to agree or disagree with the research content, and to assimilate, thematize, utilize, or judge the scholarship. In this way, "Here I am" enacts a readerly responsibility to alterity that steps back and holds space to receive the textual other as a *Thou* (Lipari 2012, 237), while at the same time remaining wholly present and attuned to what has been written. It is an affirmative, "Yes, I hear you!" that creates space for others to dwell without imposition. It is precisely this openness to difference across textual distance that allows for genuine dialogue to emerge (Friedman 2002, 98).

For Daniel Coleman (2009), such a receptive listening posture is actualized when readers become "slow and active" in encountering a text (30). He writes, "Readers must do the actual mental and physical labour of tracing the lines of print across the page, across page after page, to exercise their capacities for recognition, comprehension, and imagination to create meaning from it" (30). He describes this process as "reflective" and "contemplative," as readers are summoned to engage the text with "continuity and slowness"—perhaps even reading the text aloud—in order to genuinely attend to what has been written (31). In fact, as Alan Jacobs (2001) contends, "Nothing can compensate for a failure to attend to what is being indicated" (52), and goes on to contrast attentiveness with indifference, which, in Bakhtin's words, "will never be able to generate sufficient attention to slow down and *linger intently* over an object" (1993, 64). To linger intently, scholarly readers must be willing to "enter another sphere of existence" (Bakhtin 1984, 184) and truly inhabit the intertextual world of the research text.

Because research texts reveal the scholarly horizons of another world (Gadamer [1975] 2004, 301–2; Ricoeur 1981, 178), readers are invited to receive that which is "initially alien" or *other* by inhabiting its sphere of existence and discovering new ideas and a multiplicity of scholarly perspectives in the process (178). In receiving that which is different from one's own views, receptive readers allow the research content *to be what it is* and seek to understand it *for its own sake* without a scholarly objective or personal agenda principally in view. In effect, readers are invited to inhabit a "Here I am" posture of presence characterized by a slow and attentive reading practice, not only to glean more insight or broaden their horizon of understanding but also to be able to engage genuinely and generously with the polyphony of textual voices they encounter in the world of the work (Arnett 2022, 205).

Research texts do not invite attentive receptivity, however, without also summoning active interpretation. Scholarly reading necessitates that scholars bring themselves to the research material, casting an eye towards how they might incorporate and integrate the world of the text into their own world and create new meaning by that conjunction. (Ricoeur 1981, 159). Moreover, academic research environments demand such interpretative practices as critical analysis and assessment, meaning that scholarly readers cannot simply *let the text be what it is* in its alterity without also donning a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricoeur 1970) by which to question the research material, critique the author's conjectures

and arguments, and unmask limitations in the methodology or conclusions (Coleman 2009, 32–35).

The ethical mandates for receptive reading, then, are meant to inform not undermine a reader's own positionality and interpretative practice in relation to textual alterity. Attentive receptivity can thus be seen as an ethical starting point, a way to dwell with otherness *before* responding, not a way to evacuate the self for the sake of an other. The danger of receptivity taken on its own as an ideal reading posture, Alan Jacobs (2001) observes, is that it can enact a *kenosis* or a "self-emptying" that avoids genuine interaction with and response-ability to the text and the scholarly voices therein (107). As Bakhtin (1981) similarly cautions, "Even . . . an understanding of the speaker's [or writer's] intention insofar as that understanding remains purely passive, purely receptive, contributes nothing new to the word under consideration, only mirroring it, seeking, at its most ambitious, merely the full reproduction of that which is already given in the word" (281). The text thus remains monologic in a purely receptive framework; it can offer a unidirectional flow of information from the research text to an attentive reader, but it cannot move toward dialogic exchange without the interpretative agency of a responsive reader.

It is only when the alterity of the text is conjoined with the interpretive action of the reader that the text is "brought out of the alienation in which it finds itself and into the living present of conversation" (Gadamer [1975] 2004, 376–77). Through interpretation, the world of the research text becomes real or "actualized" in the world of the receptive reader (Ricoeur 1981, 185). "Initially the text had only a sense, that is, internal relations or a structure," Ricoeur posits, "now it has meaning, that is, a realization in the discourse of the reading subject" (159). In other words, while scholarly readers initially immerse themselves in the world of the research text and think along its lines, they must also conjoin the research text with their world and make meaning of it along their own lines of thought.

Ricoeur (1981) uses the term "appropriation" to characterize this conjunctive movement (159). As he puts it: "'Appropriation' . . . means 'to make one's own what was initially 'alien'" through the realization and actualization of textual meaning for the present reader (185). Ricoeur concedes that appropriation is typically conceived in the negative, as a way of "subsuming interpretation to the finite capacities of understanding of the present reader" (190). Indeed, as Lisbeth Lipari (2012) cautions, appropriation is akin to relational closure in that it collapses the space between self and other. From her Levinasian perspective, appropriation is a way of "doing violence to the otherness of the other" and "absorbs the other into conformity with the self" (237). In a textual context, Alan Jacobs calls this a "quixotic" hermeneutical impulse that "transforms books into mirrors" wherein readers see reflections of themselves superimposed onto the text (91). In this self-reflective gesture, Jacobs warns, "otherness [or] difference cannot be tolerated" (92). The result of such "reflexion" is yet another monologic experience of the text, where textual otherness is absorbed as an object by the interpreting subject (Friedman 2002, 103).

For Ricoeur, however, appropriation is not limited to *I–It* relations or absorptions of otherness in the interpretative process. From his perspective,

making that which is "alien" in the text "one's own" refers to a reader's participatory and conjunctive act of meaning-making that enlarges textual significance in the reader's interpretative practice rather than enacting a power-play that subsumes alterity by means of subjective projections onto the text (190). While readers necessarily bring their concerns, investments, and biases to research texts as part of their unique positionality, appropriation need not result in an interpretative "taking possession" of the text *as an object for oneself* (Ricoeur 1981, 191). Instead, it invites a flexible "letting go" of oneself into the alterity of the text (191) and the polyphony of scholarly voices represented therein (Bakhtin 1981, 354), which can shift one's established notions or raise questions about one's assumptions and cause one to reorient oneself in the process (Ricoeur 1981, 158). In this sense, making a research text "one's own" is to *make it real for oneself* in the moment of interpretation and to respond to it from that position of realization. It is in this moment that the research text opens up on to other things, offers new insights and a deeper understanding of the topic, has transformational power for the reader, and lives on dialogically in and through the reader's response (158).

Such appropriative meaning-making invites dialogic "conjunction and renewal" not only in the context of research understanding but also in the practice of self-understanding (Ricoeur 1981, 158), culminating in new ways of looking at oneself. Genuine research inquiry does not typically begin in the abstract realm of detached objectivity, but with a reader's real and present concerns or pressing questions about a particular subject matter. While scholarly readers are expected to perform critical and objective analyses of research material, scholarly interpretations cannot be disconnected from the rest of the reader's life (Arnett 2011, 46). "The content, after all, does not fall into [one's] head like a meteor from another world," as Bakhtin (1993) remarks, perhaps with tongue in cheek, but rather it is "woven into the . . . fabric of my emotional-volitional, my living and effective, thinking-experiencing" (33). When readers actualize research texts through their interpretative practice, then, they not only appropriate the content intellectually, but consider its full impact for themselves: What does this research material mean *for me* in the various contexts and communities in which I find myself? In such moments of genuine inquiry, scholars set down their abstract queries contrived in an ivory tower to descend into the "mud of everyday life" (Arnett 2011, 46).

While this impulse toward "research as me-search" can lead to forms of textual absorption or a disregard of otherness in the meaning-making process, Ricoeur (1981) points to an alternative understanding of self-reflection as *self-inquiry* or *self-critique* (191), in which textual alterity has the power to bring a reader's perspectives, prejudices, beliefs, or behaviours into question. In the best-case scenario, appropriation summons self-analysis and self-discernment: "the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself" (Ricoeur 1981, 158). This form of self-reflection is wholly present and open to multiple voices and various perspectives, as readers connect the views they have received in other contexts with those in the text and seek new insights or alternative ways to approach their concerns (Jacobs 2001, 92).

By way of inquiry and self-analysis, scholarly readers have the potential to release their preconceived notions and interpretative projections in order to ask genuine questions and gain revelatory understanding (Ricoeur 1981, 193), thus engaging in a perpetual process of "becoming" rather than confirming a fixed state of ego-consciousness or reified identity marker (Ewald 1993, 341).

In ordinary practice, however, scholarly readers are not perpetually open to alterity, polyphony, or self-inquiry in their acts of research appropriation. To make something initially alien "one's own," means that readers inevitably *take in otherness* in multiple ways, some that are genuinely dialogic and constructively self-critical and others that are monologic and self-absorbed. Indeed, many different motivations come into play in reading research. Regardless of our ethical ideal for a Thou-orientation in appropriative reading practices, research texts are still typically taken up as objects of information and made "one's own" as a means to a particular intellectual end: We are primarily trying to figure out what a research text has to offer, how it relates to other research material in the field, how we can make meaning of it for our purposes, and how we can conjoin our ideas with it in productive ways. This praxis is not necessarily unethical but confirms an inevitable convergence between dialogic and monologic discourses that become more or less ethical depending on one's orientation toward otherness within them.

Scholarly reading thus involves inhabiting multiple interpretive locations and taking on various orientations in relation to research texts, orientations that range from passive to active, from receptive to appropriative, from critically distanced to personally invested, from objective to subjective. What scholarly readers bring to the text in any given moment and how they orient themselves in relation to textual alterity through their meaning-making practices will determine whether the research offers a revelatory word or an informational resource, whether it stimulates a new perspective or confirms old assumptions. How readers make the text "one's own" proves to be multifaceted, nuanced, and variable because it necessarily involves a textual interplay between discourses and a relational interplay between oneself and others in the process of discovering one's position on a topic and discerning how to situate oneself in relation to the research of others.

A Writing Posture: Answerability and Generative Response in Research Composition

Through the process of interpretative appropriation, scholarly readers transition from an orientation of attentive receptivity to a praxis of reciprocal response, by which scholarly dialogue begins to unfold. This dialogue becomes manifest to others in and through one's written research compositions. In the research writing of most humanities and social science disciplines, a dialogic response typically takes the form of a written stance in relation to the research of others and takes the shape of a responsible interaction throughout the work by means of a writer's careful representations and considered analyses of others' works (Stumm 2021). While this written interaction is typically structured as a "technical dialogue"

(Buber [1947] 2002; Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010, 120), it nonetheless retains an ethical impulse and has ethical implications for scholarly communication. If research texts summon a response by their very acts of articulation, then writers are responsible for the "answer" they compose.

For Bakhtin (1993), the possibility of ethical dialogue depends on an "answerable" self who receives and responds to the textual utterances of others in an active and participatory way (27–30). As Bakhtin describes it, *answerability* is not an abstract, ethical principle of response, but "the self-activity of a performed act" effected as an "actual, real deed" or "uttered word" (27) that affirms one's own "unique truth" in a particular, concrete, singular moment of response (28). In the context of research composition, answerability is directly linked to one's authorship. As Helen Ewald (1993) succinctly puts it, "Answering is authoring. Authoring is responding" (341). To convey a response to the written research of others, then, one answers by authoring one's own work and actualizing one's own unique positionality in one's written utterance. As we *answer from* our unique placement, we conjoin our agency and individuality to the alterity of other scholarly voices in the ongoing discussion (Bakhtin 1993, 28; Clark and Holquist 1984, 245). As we *answer for* our unique placement, we take ownership and responsibility for our response because no one else can stand and speak from the same place that we do (Holquist 1990, 167).

Ricoeur (1992) similarly places activity and agency at the heart of one's response and responsibility toward others. He holds that one must be able to designate oneself in the act of response in order to be genuinely responsive and responsible to others (341). As he writes, "It is in me that the movement coming from the other completes its trajectory: the other constitutes me as responsible, that is, capable of responding. In this way, the word of the other comes to be placed at the origin of my acts" (336). For a dialogue to occur, one cannot maintain a purely receptive orientation of "Here I am" with an affirmative "Yes!" to the words of another but must also offer a declarative word of self-designation in response: "Here is where I stand!" (168). In taking a stance, research writers do not evacuate an affirming, receptive orientation toward the research of others, but conjoin their own position to that affirmation, offering a "Yes, *and*" or "Yes, *but*" response that builds on, questions, and contends with the work of others. Such a stance calls for conviction (Ricoeur 1992, 339) and self-investment (Bakhtin 1993, 32) in the dialogic development of research knowledge.

In this sense, a research stance necessarily involves the subjectivity of the author, as their valuations and evaluations, background, experience, and bias will inevitably come into play as they position themselves and share what they see from where they stand (Holquist 1990, 167; Arnett 2011, 55; Arnett 2024, 16). As George Steiner (1984) aptly puts it: one "cannot be impartial or take a stance outside [oneself]" (70). Indeed, the fact that one has begun to speak or write about something at all, "means that [one has] already assumed a certain attitude toward it—not an indifferent attitude, but an interested-effective attitude," Bakhtin observes (1993, 32). While such expressions of human disclosure shake the semblance of research writing as wholly objective, abstract, or informational, they are in fact the most authentic way of engaging dialogically with the research of

others. This is not to say that research writers should privilege their subjectivity in solipsistic ways or engage in egocentric critiques of other viewpoints. Rather, human disclosure means that in positing a research stance, authors directly convey that they are situated in a particular context and community with a specific lens through which they are viewing the topic (Steiner 1984, 72–73). They may even allude to their own story as it has come to inform their positionality and inquiry. They are also honest in showing how they are engaging with the work of others from that stance in conjunctive, generative, and responsible ways.

Taking a stance, then, not only involves determining one's position in relation and response to others, it also suggests a posture of accountability at the heart of one's response. As Ricoeur (1992) observes, taking a stance means that "I am *accountable for* my actions before another" and I conduct myself in such a manner "that others can *count on*" me (165). In other words, to be answerable in my authorship means that I am not only capable of responding, "Here is where I stand!" in relation to others, I am also affirming my accountability to others in my research community in the very act of taking a stance. I take responsibility for my research position—its insights and limitations of perspective—so that readers can trust that I am authoring my own work and representing the truth as I see it (this is *my account*), as well as openly *accounting* for the research of others that has informed my position through citational acknowledgement (Stumm 2021, 119–20).

To be accountable to my readers and to the researchers I have invoked in my work, I must constantly ask myself: Is my audience able to recognize the multiplicity of others with whom I am engaged in my research process and the multiple ways I have come to my information and conclusions by means of their insights (Stumm 2021, 55–56)? Ewald extends this responsibility further, suggesting that we also need to be attuned to "the difference between our responses, our perceptions of accountability, and those of others" (343). In my responsible and answerable authorship, then, I must take into account "all the factors," as Bakhtin puts it (1993, 28)—my unique positionality, intentionality, background, and scholarly context, other scholars in the conversation, our differing frameworks and discourses, the range of readers, etc.—in order to engage with other scholars in ethically dialogic ways within a research composition.

As we consider the multiple factors of accountability, it becomes clear that authoring a stance is not simply for one's own sake as a means to direct one's writing. Rather, it is *other-orientated* in at least two ways. First, as we have seen, authoring a stance is a conjunctive way to answer or respond to other researchers, thereby joining a dialogue about the topic that is already in motion and contributing new knowledge or insight to that discussion. Second, authoring a stance is a means to open the dialogue to other readers, inviting them to consider another perspective and respond with their stance and scholarly insights.

A stance can be considered an opening to readers in that it represents an author's unique position and limited viewpoint from where they stand, conveying an "open unity" or "open totality" in their work (Bakhtin 1986, 6, 7; Jacobs 2001, 53): "Here is *what I see* from where I stand." Since one's location is wholly singular, there will always be something else to see and say on the subject from another place. A research stance is also a temporal-locative assertion—"Here is where I

stand *right now*"—which suggests that one's authorial position is provisional, in flux, and shifting over time in the face of new research, interests, contexts, interlocutors, and experiences. Indeed, one's inquiry is never finished: while one might be standing *here now*, the research impulse is to wonder where to go from here. When we posit genuine or open-ended questions as part of our research inquiry or conclude our work by pointing out areas for further study, we implicitly turn toward our audience (Stumm 2021, 308). We call on readers to engage with our work in conjunction with the work of others, addressing gaps in the dialogue with their stance and taking things *from here* for the overall benefit of the research community (Giltrow 2005, 183). There is always something yet-to-be-determined about a topic in our communal inquiry. There is always something more to be seen and told from another position. Hence, there are continual openings for each of us to participate anew in "the living, ongoing event" of written scholarly dialogue (Bakhtin 1993, 32–33).

In research composition, most of these dialogues take the form of an informational exchange over specific research material in an effort to share understanding and develop knowledge together. However, moments of genuine dialogue can imbue a reciprocal scholarly exchange with an *I–Thou* encounter. In taking a responsive stance to the work of others, research writers may have an unexpected and momentary meeting with "real presence" in their scholarship, where the reflections of another thinker or the research data itself ceases to be an object of analysis and *comes alive* (Steiner 1984, 85). As Buber (1958) aptly describes it: "Here the word has from time to time become life, and this life is *teaching*" (42). Such moments of learning are most likely to occur when researchers already inhabit an ethical orientation of openness and curiosity in their explorations, seeking a range of perspectives and being willing to change their minds. But actual revelation cannot be forced. It happens unbidden, "an unsought, unwilled encounter with and answerability to the 'real presence'" of something outside one's ego (Steiner 1984, 91). While new information can certainly redirect an author's research objectives or compositional process, an *I–Thou* encounter reveals a glimpse of "the spirit behind the letter" (85), something *wholly other* which incites a genuine "Aha!" moment that shakes one's convictions and changes one's stance.

Such an encounter heralds a moment of genuine discovery in the research writing process, whereby the research data, theoretical frameworks, scholarly ideas of others, or one's own novel insights are temporarily dislodged from their informational status to become a revelatory *gift* here and now (Steiner 1984, 84). In this moment, one's *I–It* relations are interrupted, summoning a new vision and a whole-being answer or response to a *Thou* (Buber 1958). This form of transformational learning is not limited to scholarly research contexts but extends outward into the rest of life, opening and re-opening us to alternative ways of being and inspiring moments of genuine dialogue about our research with others beyond the text. Notably, such moments of extra-textual dialogue often lead researchers back into textual discourse, imbuing their work with deeper conviction as they revise their research stance and redirect their compositional activity. And yet, while having deeply informed an author's way of being and

revitalized their thought processes, this revelatory gift typically remains a secret, hidden behind the monologic discourse of the research composition itself.

Indeed, even a genuinely dialogic *I–Thou* encounter in the research process will inevitably slip into an *I–It* relation so it can "enter the structure of knowledge," as Buber notes (1958, 40). The "It" of scholarly knowledge is composed of ideas, images, explanations, analyses, and comparisons that objectify "real presence" by reducing existence to consciousness and fixing discovery in the established monologic discourse of the academic disciplines (Bakhtin 1984, 81; Buber 1957, 40–42; Friedman 2002, 72). Notably, this practice is not unethical per se. It is a necessary part of our scholarly communicative process (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010), as we cannot remain in a revelatory state of learning for long. We must descend the mountain of vision and re-enter the structures of knowledge by which we describe and discuss our discoveries in the scholarly community.

However, the *I–It* relation of monologic discourse does become problematic when it blocks the possibility of an *I–Thou* encounter and the revelatory insights that arise from a genuine relation with the research material or the people discussing it (Friedman 2002, 72). This relational block can be manifest in various ways—from privileging informational knowledge at the expense of other forms of insight, to erasing human positionality for the sake of scholarly objectivity; from favoring the subjective autonomy of authorship over the intersubjective nature of research dialogue, to avoiding human subjectivity altogether with totalizing, abstract, or over-generalized truth-claims. In light of these tensions and blockages we continually need to ask ourselves: What is research for? What is our aim and purpose in its development and dissemination? If it is to accrue, possess, convey, and exchange information, then using monologic discourse in a technical dialogue will suffice. We can focus our ethics of difference on a respect for *things*—the research data we accumulate, the frameworks and theories we use, the concepts and illustrations we develop, and the ideas of others that we integrate in our work—formulating them in our cognition and then in our compositions with clarity and regard.

If, however, our purpose is to explore subject matter as a living encounter with otherness in order to discover meaningful truths together for the good for the research community and beyond, then it is critical that we be willing to open ourselves again and again to the inquiry, renewal, and transformation of learning, leaving space for the spirit of the research to speak and for genuine dialogue with other scholars to emerge in the compositional process. While this form of relation is more involved, messy, and time-consuming to cultivate, it is also more rewarding and impactful. It invites authors to be present to the insights and the enigmas, the slippages and the play involved in the event of understanding research with others—to listen, to take a stance, to respond, to change one's mind, and to start anew. As Barthold (2010) aptly puts it, genuine dialogue "catches us up in its movement just like play does. We want to keep it going" (107). It is precisely this movement that enlivens our research scholarship and keeps us playing on.

Concluding Thoughts

In this article, I have endeavored to convey something of the ethical and existential nature of the research process—both in its readerly and writerly dimensions—in order to reflect on some of the possibilities and complexities of engaging dialogically with others within the context of scholarly communication. In particular, I applied some key ethical orientations toward alterity established in dialogic ethics to this context: an open and attentive receptivity toward the words of others, an appropriative hermeneutics that is both conjunctive and mindful of difference, and an assertive and accountable response to the research of others in one's stance and compositional development. Ideally, researchers are opened to difference by a genuine encounter with the "real presence" of alterity (a *Thou* moment) in the research being studied and the researchers being interacted with. Such a revelatory encounter takes research writing beyond its *I–It* world of information and knowledge dissemination into an event of genuine dialogue and transformative learning.

I observed, however, that while these orientations toward otherness are deeply ethical, they cannot be demanded or enforced (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010). Moreover, our ability to practice them is complicated by the institutionalized structures of knowledge that direct our communication and the monologic discourse and technical dialogue that pervades our written scholarship. We must also contend with our own egoic inclinations toward utility, economy, autonomy, and speed in producing research material and toward criticism, self-absorption, or detachment in engaging with the research of others. Given these ethical tensions, I want to conclude by returning to the pedagogical context in which I started this inquiry and touch briefly on how we might help introductory students navigate the ethical complexities of research writing and better understand why research dialogue matters.

In general terms, research dialogue matters as a necessary counterpart to the monologic discourse that pervades scholarly writing. Undergraduate students are typically introduced to research scholarship as an *It*—the objective knowledge they must gather and use for a particular research assignment. Most research composition textbooks reinforce an *I–It* model of relationality, focusing on the "how-tos" or technical aspects of writing, so that students' work fits within the established structures and strictures of the research essay genre. Students thus learn that scholarly composition is a matter of rules to follow, formulations to learn, methods to replicate, language to emulate, and procedural hoops to jump through in order to complete an assigned task and fulfill the expectations of their instructor. Incidentally, AI technology like *Grammarly* and *Chat GPT* further strengthens this monologic relation, since these tools are geared to help students fix the written formulations and structural dimensions of a research composition and produce a generic, automated *It* that reflects the conventional style and tone of research prose. Even the dialogic "moves that matter" in research writing proposed by Graff and Birkenstein (2010) are framed monologically as a structural

interaction—a way to organize and convey one's research information as a response to what other researchers have said.

While the rules, forms, and styles of scholarly discourse are important for introductory students to grasp in order to reflect the communication situation in which they are writing, reducing the dialogic process of research writing to a technical practice leaves much to be desired in helping students encounter the genuinely human traces and interhuman dimensions of research composition. Humanizing research is critical for introducing scholars as real people with particular values and concerns who are thinking with other scholars and developing knowledge together as they share their written work. With this in mind, students need not don an intellectualized pseudo-self to read and write research papers. They can bring their real selves—their actual identities, interests, and ideas—to the table as they join a research dialogue. Many introductory students may not yet be ready or able to engage in this way because they are unable to discern what the research might mean for them or know where they stand in relation to it. We can nonetheless cultivate openings for dialogic relationality to emerge that inform their *I–It* experiences of research texts and initiate moments of revelatory insight and learning. There are undoubtedly many ways to do this. Let me briefly mention three that have come to the fore in the course of my writing here.

First, we can foster the students' practice of "real presence"—their genuine *being here now*—existentially and intellectually. One way to do that is by helping them to discover how they are uniquely situated in the world by means of the "narrative ground" on which they stand (Arnett 2011): What are their stories? What are their concerns? What do they care about? What does it mean for them to be here now? Sharing stories of background and identity (orally or in writing) and discussing the various ways they are located in the world can offer students a tangible starting point from which to understand what it means to be positioned, located, and biased in one's research viewpoints. It can also help them to discern what kinds of topics and forms of research they truly care about in order to inspire a personally-invested and meaningful research inquiry.

Second, we can invite students to take a posture of openness to difference. One way to do that is to cultivate curiosity about a relevant topic and introduce a set of diverse readings about it, showing a range of differing perspectives that are all equally valid. Another way is to introduce small writing projects that involve summarizing the words of a scholar with whom the student *disagrees* or orchestrating the voices of several thinkers together according to how their viewpoints connect and differ from each other. In the process, students can learn to practice receptive listening to alternate viewpoints, develop a generous hermeneutics and the careful representation of other voices, and begin to locate themselves in the mix. For instance, students could be invited to visually map out where various scholars "stand" on a topic and then indicate where they stand. As they find themselves situated closer to one thinker than another, they may begin to discern the interhuman relationality that exists between themselves and other thinkers and be able to articulate why they've located themselves where they have.

Third, we can empower a posture of conviction and response-able agency. This is perhaps the most difficult for introductory students to actualize. To be able to respond—"Here is where I stand!"—to the research of others and to be accountable for one's stance in the dialogue necessitates that students not only understand the prose they are reading, but can discern what the research *means* for them and articulate their convictions to others in responsive and responsible ways. Most students, however, are deeply uncertain about taking a stance in a research conversation, anxious about their ability to respond to experts in the field, and convinced they have nothing valuable to contribute to the dialogue by means of their research writing. In trying to assuage their fears, they may decide to give up on the effort of discerning what they think and don someone else's ideas—in the form of plagiarism or parroting—to speak for them. These choices prove to be problematic not only because they steal or subsume the voices of others rather than respond to them, they also result in the evacuation of one's own agency and circumvent the genuine pleasures that come from sharpening one's creative and constructive capabilities and asserting one's own voice. It is critical for students to recognize that every effort toward honing their own response-able stance, no matter how tenuous or unpolished, offers a valuable contribution to a research dialogue precisely because no one else can see exactly what they see or say exactly what they can say from where they stand.

Ultimately, dialogue matters in research composition because it is one of the main ways that scholars can genuinely meet like-minded others and develop meaningful research relations between them for the benefit of the scholarly community and beyond. Despite the fact that research texts can obscure our human traces and monologic discourse necessarily pervades our scholarly interactions, we can nonetheless create openings for genuine dialogue to occur in our research and pedagogical practices, enriching our mutual learning with revelatory insights and inspiring our research knowledge with interhuman connections. Given the many ways that *I–It* relations have come to dominate our academic, social, and political spheres and the collective difficulties we face in opening to otherness, any moments of genuine encounter with the "real presence" of another are a welcome gift.

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Communication Ethics in Homelessness: A Dialogic Analysis of Professional Encounters with People in the Homelessness Crisis

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Abstract: This study examines communication ethics in homelessness through a dialogic analysis of professional encounters with people experiencing homelessness crises. Drawing on philosophical frameworks from, inter alia, Levinas, Marcel, and Ricoeur, the research investigates how ethical dialogue can transform relationships between housed and homeless individuals. The study employs a transformative approach to dialogue (TAD), analysing empowerment and recognition genres in communication at St. Lazarus Shelter in Warsaw, Poland. Through documentary analysis of a shipbuilding project involving homeless residents and community supporters, the research demonstrates how face-to-face dialogue restores dignity, agency and understanding. The findings reveal that authentic dialogue enables bidirectional transformation that empowers both homeless individuals and professionals. The research confirms that modern homelessness requires interventions addressing fundamental human needs for acceptance, security and belonging. The study contributes theoretical insights to dialogic communication while offering practical implications for homelessness services, suggesting that relational approaches achieve superior outcomes to deficit-based conceptions.

Keywords: homelessness; communication ethics; dialogic analysis; transformative approach to dialogue

1. Introduction: The Sociocultural Background of Modern Homelessness

Homelessness has accompanied humanity since time immemorial. Its diverse forms across historical, geographical and cultural contexts are reflected in broad terms used worldwide to grasp this complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Glasser and Bridgman 2004, 240). The ways in which homelessness has been labelled in different times and places correspond to the unmeasurable variety of

lifestyles, issues and strategies that it involves (Koegel 2007b; O'Sullivan 2023). Not only do these perspectives articulate visions and realisations of homelessness by the homeless themselves (see Levinson and Ross 2007, Part I), but more importantly, they indicate how such people have been seen and responded to in their cultures and beyond (McNaughton 2008, 7; Bretherton and Pleace 2023b, 2). The categories by which the homeless have been framed within and outside their environments disclose the condition of not only this specific group, but also of the whole society. In the past, the image of the homeless person in the Western world was reduced usually to a stereotype of a middle-aged lone (white) male, often with a criminal history, addictions, and mental problems. In the light of recent knowledge, however, such a profile was produced by arbitrary counts resulting from difficulties in reaching out to homeless people, from imprecise research methods and from political ideologies (Koegel 2004, 227; Mostowska and Sheridan 2016, 235–43; see also Bretherton and Pleace 2023c, Part I). From the mid-twentieth century onwards, homelessness has uncovered a much more intricate, dynamic, and convoluted landscape as a global phenomenon of (post)modern times.

Statistically speaking, the second half of the twentieth century brought an unprecedented growth in rates and extent of homelessness around the world. This rise has accelerated even more at the turn of the century, with diverse and large social groups such as women, children, adolescents, families, migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities joining the global homeless population (Erickson 2004, 205; Toro and Janisse 2004, 246; Koegel 2007a, 245–46; Mostowska and Sheridan 2016, 235–43; Ginsberg 2020b, 57–73; see also Bretherton and Pleace 2023c, Parts II–III). The social diversity of the homeless from the transitional decades of the two centuries have inescapably brought new forms of homelessness, which make today a socio-cultural continuum (Erickson 2004; Toro and Janisse 2004; McNaughton 2008, 4–7; Humphry 2022, 4–5; Bretherton and Pleace 2023b, 2–3). It encompasses such broad social cohorts as the literally homeless (the roofless—"absolute homelessness"), the houseless (those living in sheds, motor vehicles, tents, etc.), the precariously housed (those living in hostels, squats, temporary accommodation, overcrowded accommodation) and, remarkably, the invisibly homeless (living on families'/acquaintances' floors —"hidden homelessness"; Erickson 2004, 204–5; Toro and Janisse 2004, 244; Ravenhill 2008, 13; Ginsberg 2020b, 57; Humphry 2022, 4). All these types indicate the omnipresence of homeless people across social and physical space in the last decades. It is these groups now who are the carriers of the new variant of the still intensifying phenomenon called "new" or "modern homelessness" (Koegel 2007a, 245–46; Farrugia 2016, 17).

The visible signs of this trend go back to at least the 1970s, which triggered a series of socio-economic and political transitions in the capitalist West, turning the world to the globalizing era of "second" or "late modernity" (e.g., McNaughton 2008, 27). Its continuing decades have been marked particularly by widespread dissolution of collective sources of meaning and identity in the face of major changes that took place in the labour market and family structure of modern capitalist societies. The locus of these changes is usually identified in mid–twentieth-century deindustrialisation, which not only rearranged the social

organization of work but also drastically affected family life. First of all, it became a driving force of ensuing social fragmentation and individualisation, both producing detraditionalized and consumer reality, governed by rising neoliberal ideologies (Farrugia 2016, 17–30). More specifically, the underlying relocation of manufacturing facilities to cheaper countries led to the ultimate decline of the industrial sector, which was drastically reduced or completely shut down in the face of the influx of lower-priced goods from abroad. The elimination of production-based economy was paralleled by the gradual replacement of the latter with a service-based economy. The whole operation caused a serious economic downturn that affected especially industrial classes (Borchert 2007). Having lost their well-paid, secure and often life-long jobs, the former industrial employees were forced to move to the growing service sector, where they usually got less-paid and unstable positions. In the midst of these transitions, large numbers of people were struck with unemployment and poverty.

Additionally, the late modern shift from production to services in capitalist societies has involved disembedding the class-based social collectives from their formerly stationary (often locationally close) workplaces to the new and residentially independent (often technologically mediated) workspaces. This was preceded by an earlier dissolution of collective sources of labour power (previously based on the traditional nuclear family as a stable provider of workforce based on the gendered division of labour) and the ensuing individualisation of the labour power by assigning it to the worker as its individual owner (Farrugia 2016, 19–20). The isolation of people in the labour market and their separation from local collectives have led to widespread fragmentation of social ties. This is observed especially in the demise of former class-based cultures, which used to build their identifications and coherence on the common sense of belonging to their shared worlds. The breakdown in the traditional division of labour (navigated by, *inter alia*, the ongoing gender revolution; McNaughton 2008, 27–28) has also strongly influenced family structure. This has happened particularly by loosening the family's internal bonds and shifting the source of individual identity from the collective to the self. The emphasis placed externally, for instance, on the role of (professional) self-dependence, efficiency, and entrepreneurship has much devalorised the importance of intimate relations, thus shifting the locus of human self-constitution and fulfilment outside the person's closest community. This has further destabilised nuclear families, whose progressive decomposition is now visible especially in growing rates of divorce, one-person households, non-matrimonial relationships, childlessness, and the blurring distinction between the private and the public (Farrugia 2016, 30). Arguably, the waning personal attachment to the family in the age of late modernity has distanced people from their local contexts, thus producing a correlated social effect of "detraditionalization," with the so-called "ahistorical" individual as its agent (Farrugia 2016, 23).

The well-known phenomenon of human "alienation" in late modernity (e.g., Colonnello 2020) has additionally been fuelled by the liberalisation of political governance in the neoliberal mode (McNaughton 2008, 25–27). Prioritising financial and economic criteria for defining the freedom of the "new"

liberal subject, the growing neoliberal movement has questioned "welfare" as the criterion of freedom for the liberal subject under social liberalism. Public goods assumed as collective warrants of individual power (largely controlled by the state) in welfare liberalism (esp. the state's provision of healthcare, education, and protection, as well as obligations to the state resulting from citizens' work and duties) are reconstituted in neoliberalism as commodities subject to privatisation, competition and consumption on the market. The increasing stress of this framework on initiative, productivity, and efficiency construct the "neo-liberated" rationality of the autonomous subject, who is meant to respond to the challenges of the highly dynamic, changeable, and, hence, unstable conditions. This is how the neoliberal self acquires a sense of individual power, which simultaneously holds them liable to manage the precarity of the situation.

On the one hand, this results in the development of the aforementioned entrepreneurial identity, with self-promotion, flexibility, and self-reliance as modern keys to success. On the other hand, this helps navigate complex transitions that people are expected to make over their life courses to confront the large-scale structural changes in progress (McNaughton 2008, 28–30). Transitions with a high risk of life failure ("divestment") are linked particularly to contractual (temporary) employment, job insecurity, frequent returns to education, constant training, family fragmentation, and the erosion of welfare. What emerges in this context is a so-called "risk society" (McNaughton 2008, 27–29), formed by alienated individuals who negotiate their insecure power of decision-making reflexively against limited choices offered to them under global constraints. Portrayed as creators of their own biographies, such "reflexive subjectivities" (Farrugia 2016, 23–25) paradoxically lose sight of irreducible relations between self and others (for examples, see Toro and Janisse 2004, 246–47; Koegel 2007a, 248–55; Mostowska and Sheridan 2016, 241–49; Bretherton and Pleace 2023a, 32). Consequently, they also lose track of collective reasons for social problems. Fearful of the uncertain social terrain, they remain more and more dependent on the labour market, consumer goods, and the welfare state.

The precarity of the late modern period translates directly to the condition of modern societies, generating the inevitable growth of social inequalities and new forms of homelessness. The neoliberal dilemma of human vacillation between personal freedom and a fate dependent on the global restructurings brings social configurations where those in advantageous positions become more powerful, in contrast to the disadvantaged ones, who become more disempowered. Such conditions build the ground for a new "class-in-the-making" called "the precariat" (Standing 2011). It is constituted by insecurity in at least seven work-related domains: the labour market, employment, job conditions, career pathways, skill development, wage level, and worker representation. It should be emphasised, however, that the emerging social order is not only a function of work–labour relations. It is now reaching the scale of a life condition, whose extreme case is modern homelessness (Humphry 2022, 10–11). The latter overlaps with other forms of precarity, such as lack of income, inadequate or disproportionate competencies/qualifications, barriers to education and employment, or insecure health, all representing different variants of modern impoverishment.

The landscape of the new precarity as a background of modern homelessness is extended by some additional markers of the social crisis under global capitalism (McNaughton 2008, 27). Its economic policy of reducing welfare services, tenancy security, and affordable and subsidised housing (e.g., Humphry 2022, 4–5) is tightly linked to the regular programmes of "deinstitutionalisation" and "gentrification" (Baumohl 2007; Williams 2007). The first trend exchanges the relational idea of care, managed by public or social institutions, into the people's self-reliance in care, managed by non-governmental, voluntary, or privatised organisations. In effect, the lack of easy access to social support particularly impacts the vulnerable ones, who are marginalised even more by rising costs of housing evidenced worldwide (Speer 2023, 108–12). When home locations of the disadvantaged become attractive for business investments, they often fall prey to economic interests, giving the pretext for massive evictions. This is what underlies the second trend of gentrification, which deepens the gap between the poor (powerless) and the rich (powerful) by producing enforced human mobility or migration (Ravenhill 2008, 13–21; Humphry 2022, 8; Consoli 2023, 191–95; Mostowska 2023, 370). Moving people either to ghettoised spaces or, alternatively, across dispersed locations, this and other new regimes (see, e.g., Mostowska and Sheridan 2016, 241; Ginsberg 2020b, 58, 73; Humphry 2022, 11–13; see also Bretherton and Pleace 2023c, Parts II–IV) segregate humans into marginalised positions. When imposed especially on the powerless, such positions further grow their insecurity, exclusion, and isolation, thus triggering individual histories of new homelessness (Ravenhill 2008, 19; Parker 2020, 142; Bretherton and Pleace 2023a, 31–32). The complex interplay of both systemic and individual factors in this phenomenon (Toro and Janisse 2004, 246–47; Koegel 2007a, 248–55; Mostowska and Sheridan 2016, 241–49; Parker 2020, 142; see also Bretherton and Pleace 2023c, Part I) results generally in blurring the boundaries between different forms of (near) homelessness associated with late modernity, such as housing exclusion, hidden homelessness, or rough sleeping (Speer 2023, 112).

2. The Ethics of "Home" and Homelessness

What has already been said above indicates that the roots of (new) homelessness can be traced, by its strict connections to modern family and society, in the sense of "home" in human life. This is because the origins of home itself, and by the same token of homelessness too, go to both family and society (Ravenhill 2008, 23). In the words of Ginsberg (2020b), we fully understand the meaning of home, thus also of homelessness, only "if we . . . understand the plight—and the right—of the homeless" (57). Indeed, it is the homeless themselves who confirm more or less outwardly, in both their stories and actions, the importance of home for a human being. There is evidence, for instance, that young homeless people associate home with comfort and security, which both mean for them "where one can construct a positive and valued identity" (Farrugia 2016, 31). The homeless people's silent longing for home is also reflected in the fact that especially the newly roofless tend to evince the strongest drives to avoid homelessness. This is interpreted as an

indicator of their significant determination at this stage to oppose their plight, and, simultaneously, of their high motivations to stay in contact with both society and themselves (Farrugia 2016, 183). On the other hand, when they are dragged into homelessness culture, the drive is stimulated typically by basic human needs, appealing, generally, to security, acceptance and love. For this reason, homeless cultures are usually based on dense social networks, strong interpersonal ties, reciprocity, co-dependence, intense friendship, trust–mistrust oppositions, and mutual protection (Ravenhill 2008, 12, 146, 161, 182; Farrugia 2016, 146). Similar to other "poverty cultures," such relations characterise people experiencing anxiety, and they are especially painful when people leave or are denied access (Ravenhill 2008, 210).

All the mechanisms described above uncover the natural human search for a sense of belonging, attachment, and identification. Such and like values are first experienced in privacy, whose cradle is family and home. According to Finch (1989), family ties are less contingent than all other social ties, and in times of social insecurity the former are most stable due to their special moral meaning. This is, first, because kinship is taken for granted (i.e. one is born into a network of family members) and, second, because it involves a sense of responsibility and obligation incomparable to any other relations. The moralised character of these bonds is a source of one's principled standing and identification in the world (Ricoeur 1992). On the one hand, the ties offer space for a person to acquire their sense of human authenticity (Heidegger 1998), which is indispensable for the human experience of autonomy, freedom, and selfhood (Schrader 2020, 110). On the other hand, the ties relate a person to the rest of society, whereby a subject acquires their sense of rootedness and co-dependence as stimuli of communal sharedness, respect, and participation (Parker 2020, 147–48). Viewed in this way, familial bonds lie at the heart of home(-making) (Farrugia 2016, 31; Ginsberg 2020a, 45–46), which is, in Aristotelian terms (*Politics*, 1252b–1258a), a bidirectional portal to both the private and the public (Schrader 2020, 111–23; Burkum 2020, 132–35). As such, the ideal of home, traced in many (if not all) of the world's cultures (Ginsberg 2020a, 43–44, 2020b, 55), generates meanings invoking the dialogic centre of human self-constitution, self-governance and safety. This is to say that the experience of home and home-making rests on the ethical presence of and exchange between oneself and others. In its role for the formation of multilayered personal—social identities (Ravenhill 2008, 11–13), home is thus what organically arranges, regulates and secures people's dialectical relations with both themselves and broader circles: peers, communities, institutions, society, homeland, etc. (see Abbarno 2020).

The search of homeless people for a satisfactory abode is reflected in their attempts, observed worldwide, to find alternative homes that can become spaces of their communal belonging. Inadequate as these alternatives often are in terms of minimal housing conditions defined for specific cultures (see Bretherton and Pleace 2023c, Parts I, IV), they give the illusion of meeting these conditions, as they are on the verge of satisfying people's basic needs. There is evidence of how people's resistance to extreme insecurity and homelessness can make them oppose despair by inventing stable housing with the potential for regular community life (e.g., "young towns" in Peru). Similarly, research on the effects of poverty in a big

city (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) indicates that poor people's efforts in their self-built resettlement can be much more profitable for the city than for the poor themselves (for an overview, see Glasser and Bridgman 2004, 241–42). At the same time, homeless people's visions of alternative homes are sometimes realised by less visible self-made dwellings that pose challenges to the violence of city streets or the dangers of nature. For example, residing in motor vehicles may be a response to the threat of police raids, which can be evaded thanks to the mobile character of such means. Common tactics include also using hidden spaces, arranging park encampments, building communal shacks, or moving out to the rugged wilderness with an aim to bypass city havoc and restrictions (Speer 2023, 113–14). Reshaping the urban and rural landscape, such alternatives imply the search for stillness, safety and homelike belonging. Additionally, they seem to open the door to private dwellings whose informal communities may offer protection against the vicissitudes of life.

However, the street relations on which the improvised homes are thus based by no means guarantee privacy or security. The first sign of the lack of the former is body exposure to the public, which deprives the people of intimacy—a basic marker of the private. The compromise between the private and the public in homeless cultures is also visible in the frequent necessity of their members to respect majority rule in return for acceptance. Following Swanson's (1992) analysis of the Aristotelian distinction between the private and the public, Schrader (2020, 122) observes that whenever prevailing morality or common opinion encroach on private activities to enforce the loss of virtue in the latter, this results in the loss of control over the private to the group. This loss further leads to the loss of personal sovereignty and, in consequence, to the change from the private to the mass collective of externally subjugated individuals (see also Arendt 1998, 257). The abridged personal sovereignty of the homeless additionally means, due to their lack of home, restricted "moral personality" (Schrader 2020, 121–23). Unable to protect a person's self-governance and free choices, the diminished moral personality further constrains public recognition of these individuals.

The increasing exposure of the homeless to the public is also noticed, along with the spread of modern global culture, in intensified consumption of media technologies by the growing "mobile homeless communities" (Humphry 2022, 5–9). This concerns especially homeless migrants, who aim to live self-enclosed domestic lives through intimate relations maintained at a distance. As supportive as the technologies are for regular interpersonal and communal contacts, they transform domesticity by uncoupling it from the spatial specificity of home. Facilitating private exchange through telecommunication channels, virtual connections mediate what is called "mobile privatisation" (Humphry 2022, 7). This means that the private encounters in such communities are navigated by the virtual sphere, whose technological component exposes the interpersonal relations to the public. Not only is private communication thereby modified by technological structures, but it also forms so-called "telecocooned" social networks that simulate the private, thus opening it to surveillance. This is how hybrid practices: traditionally domestic (familial, residential) and originally non-domestic (industrial, virtual) allow the exercise of improvised homes as

alternatives conveyed by modern technologies. The effect of such practices is also "private mobilisation," which evinces the reverse side of the same process of re-embedding home(-making) technologically into virtual/public domains (Humphry 2022, 8).

The threat for the vulnerable which results from the demise of the private parallels another threat that comes from the experience of homelessness itself. Broad evidence from personal histories of homelessness suggests that this phenomenon usually happens in response to violence, stress, or loss experienced in different social groups, at different life stages, and from various sources. Many episodes of homelessness, especially in children, women, and minority representatives, are caused by domestic aggression, physical/sexual abuse, power imbalance, or racial discrimination, all pointing to different kinds of home or institutional aberration (Farrugia 2016, 27–34; Humphry 2022, 6). Typical causes of homelessness in migrants and refugees, in turn, are economic restrictions, political/military violence, or oppression by state/migratory regimes (Mostowska and Sheridan 2016; Ginsberg 2020b; Consoli 2023). As far as teenagers and adults are concerned, they generally show, like the previously mentioned groups, heightened levels of aggression (Ravenhill 2008, 165–71; Burkum 2020, 128), which can be interpreted as a symptom of their isolation, rejection, and exclusion (Johnson 2017, 17).

Importantly, the popular belief that the reasons for people's bigger aggression in homelessness lie in "deficit" explanations (especially criminal activities, mental problems, and personality disorders) turns out to be insubstantial in the light of recent observations (Bretherton and Pleace 2023a, 30). First of all, the views reflecting these explanations (of "sin," "sickness," and "systems," respectively) disregard the fact that many factors of homelessness (e.g., addiction, mental illness, criminal behaviours) are in a mutual but inconsistent relationship. Arguably, much addiction starts *after* homelessness, not before—similar to mental illness, which may happen both before and *during* homelessness. Likewise, serious criminal histories belong to a *minority* of homeless people, who are often arrested for victimless offenses due to their homeless lifestyles (Toro and Janisse 2004, 246). What follows is, first, that the individual causes of homelessness—hence, of aggression generated with it—are more variable than structural causes: the broader the scope of homelessness considered, the weaker the individual causes, with structural factors remaining constant (Bretherton and Pleace 2023a, 32). Second, homelessness is not only attributable to "social disintegration" or "weak social integration" (for a discussion of these factors, see Erickson 2004, 206–7 and Lovell 2007, 137–39), which themselves turn out to be derivative of more basic causes. At the core of the latter lie unmet personal needs for, *inter alia*, (mental) healthcare, complex treatment, and support (Bretherton and Pleace 2023a, 25), all detailing the more fundamental human needs noted above (see also Ravenhill 2008, 182).

For the above-mentioned reasons, it can be claimed that homelessness is always a situation of pain and suffering that comes in reaction to significant stress and trauma caused by the lack of acceptance or security in a person's social environment (Erickson 2004, 206; Johnson 2017, 17; Levy 2017a, 40; Ginsberg

2020a, 52; Pleace and Bretherton 2023, 440). This lack may take different forms: mistreatment, belittlement, criticism, abuse, or violence, to name but a few, and it often leads to various disorders: psychological, mental, physical, behavioural, etc. Underpinned by fear and anxiety, the distress produces isolation, which manifests outwardly in withdrawal, suspicion, aggression, and exclusion (Ravenhill 2008, 208–21; Parker 2020, 150). It can thus be claimed that the effect of personal/social disintegration in homelessness is generated by the above-mentioned lack. The reverse side of this lack is the need for social contact and safety, which generates the alternative strategies of home-making discussed above. Although the practices strive for integration, they are not adequate for building stability or security. This is especially visible in the life hazards that the homeless accept: environmental, hygienic, health, etc. (Speer 2023, 114), despite huge risks to their well-being and future (Pleace and Bretherton 2023, 434). Next, this is also visible in the frequent institutional circuits that the homeless make (in their returns to shelters, hospitals, prisons, etc.) in search of social services. This means, first, that street ties are insufficient for help in homeless cultures; second, that interpersonal support is missing or inadequate there (Shinn 2007, 297); and, third, that the activities behind the returns (especially criminal ones) are often motivated by help seeking—a poor substitute for adequate services (Fischer 2007, 326–27). To sum up, it can be said that the home alternatives performed by the homeless function as "survival/coping strategies" (Leufgen and Snow 2007) to respond to and resist the social, economic, and ideological pressures of the modern world (Humphry 2022, 6; Speer 2023, 114).

3. Dialogic Communication in Homelessness

The relevance of wholesome family and community life for regaining acceptance, stability, and security by homeless people is observed in dialogic initiatives undertaken in cooperation between the housed and the homeless towards mutual integration. These activities operate through flexible, contextualised, and need-oriented programmes for the homeless launched especially in areas of governance, finances, and housing. They are performed by the use of "dialogic language" (cf. Levy and Johnson 2017), which contributes to subjective participation of both the housed and the homeless in their mutual interaction (Parker 2020, 148–51).

The dialogic communication in the programmes runs through inclusive discourse tuned to the special needs of homeless persons who are willing to resettle to temporary or more stable housing. The diverse genres of this exchange arrange access to long-term employment, low-threshold housing, micro-credit financing, revolving loans, tenure security, or title to land. The genres may also include requests for a relaxation of municipal or provincial building standards (Glasser and Bridgman 2004, 242–43; Ravenhill 2008, 222). Such practices are applied to help the vulnerable maintain economic self-sufficiency and ease the tension accompanying decisions to start new life. Although legal, economic, and housing support is not sufficient as an exit route from homelessness (Ravenhill 2008, 182), when boosted by human cooperation in everyday activities, it is a

predictor of prolonged stays in permanent housing (Toro and Janisse 2004, 249). For one thing, stable housing has been shown to lessen symptoms of complex trauma and mental/physical illness. This is evidenced in matching proportions between human compassion recognised in housing support and overall rates of homelessness (Toro and Janisse 2004, 247–48). Due to a steady decrease in stress levels produced by tenure stability in all adult groups, the provision of secure housing is considered a priority for social integration, before any other support, including the potential need for formal treatment (McNaughton 2008, 95; Johnson 2017, 17).

The dialogic aspect of this support lies specifically in the unconditional and ethical quality of the help discourse shared. This is what underlies the participatory exchange between the helpers and help recipients (Parker 2020, 148–51), where both parties attend to each other's calls for agency, partnership and responsibility (see Levy and Johnson 2017). Such dialogic initiatives are exemplified, for instance, by self-made/self-help housing projects and various kinds of intermediate help between outreach and permanent shelter/housing (Glasser and Bridgman 2004, 241–44). The former build on future residents' capital (e.g., Housing First, Homes First, or Homes First Society), assigning homeless people the rank of project constructors responsible for planning, building, and arranging their own housing (Finn 2017, viii; Johnson 2017, 17; for a critique of practical realisations of such programmes, see Speer 2023, 111–12). The idea is to offer low-demand, "no-questions-asked" services whose main goal is acceptance. This goal may also be pursued by means of special architecture discourse, which can adjust transitional housing to tenants' needs for social spaces. For stability purposes, such projects are often supported by professionals or tenant organisations. They assist the residents in acquiring community rules, routines, and responsiveness, which are indispensable for social discipline and a sense of personal safety (Ravenhill 2008, 212; Johnson 2017, 18–23). It is noteworthy that the process relies primarily on homeless persons' engagement and decision-making, which are crucial for the individuals to achieve independence and self-sustainability (Ravenhill 2008, 183). Similarly to self-made/self-help housing, the initiatives of outreach—shelter help mentioned above focus on other types of support "on demand." Providing adequate facilities for everyday functioning (hygienic, physical, educational, recreational, etc.), this kind of help mediates the development of community sites that offer daytime or day-and-night respite (Speer 2023, 113; see also Levinson and Ross 2007, Part VI). Based on non-profit local connections (Johnson 2017, 21), such support exemplifies a disinterested attitude towards helping (Parker 2020, 146).

The above-mentioned "service" genres could not play their helping role without the use of dialogic language. Most communication that contributes to social integration in homelessness exploits various aspects of storytelling, narrative role-building, and rhetorical perspectivation. These function as major discursive strategies for the construction of their agents' dialogic contexts, identities, and relations. One of the basic dialogic means for people's exit routes from homelessness is developing narration on the individuals' complicated life histories. Its function is to process the subjects' difficult past and open new,

constructive visons of the future to them. The stories told accentuate their authors' strengths and weaknesses with the aim of learning about the subjects' individual profiles, experiences, values, and ideas (Levy 2017c, 75–80). Any contrasts, turns, or disconnections in narrative plots may serve as transition points for transforming conflictual accounts into dialogic retellings inviting other characters. The stories also enable participants to take both a personalised and knowledge-focused approach to issues covered. They construct a context-rooted grasp on matters voiced, whereby the tellers can avoid data abstraction and recognise the trauma underlying homelessness. In this way, narratives emphasise the centrality of relations in human life and enhance trust and a sense of safety in their sharers. At the same time, they build distance between the past and the present, which reinforces an objective reflection on the problems considered (Ravenhill 2008, 207; Levy 2017c, 76–80; Johnson 2017, 14–23; Middleton 2017, 94).

Sharing stories of homelessness involves constructing and reconstructing old and new social roles and positions simultaneously (Quinney 2017). First of all, it allows the voices of the vulnerable to be heard publicly (Ravenhill 2008, 212; Parker 2020, 150), which, in turn, requires the dialogic skill of "discursive listening" by the stories' recipients (Winslade and Monk 2000, 140–43). The latter expresses one's stance of neutrality and openness, signalled in communicative readiness to accept contrasting perspectives and worldviews. At the same time, it includes an ability to reflect on one's cultural bias, which in dialogic terms means avoiding thematic "blind spots" (Levy 2017c, 78–80). The discursive construction of social roles in dialogic narratives of homelessness also consists of following the continuum of expertise–partnership discourse styles. This includes reviving in interaction between the vulnerable and their interlocutors different roles from the speakers' histories, which may involve taking on by them cooperative roles of experts, laypeople, and peers.

Reviving positive roles enables the speakers to recognise their relational potential, which can thus be redefined and channelled to new social contexts (Levy 2017c, 73). If not through interpersonal retellings, such potential may be discovered, for instance, through personalised re-readings of culture texts: films, pop science, literature, biographies, documentaries, etc. Making sense of their content can facilitate the readers' own dialogic recovery of a sense of achievement, self-pride and dignity. Reviving negative roles, on the other hand, serves to reconsider the subjects' complex past with the purpose of accepting it as part of their identities. The idea is to assist the homeless in coping with their distress by confronting it, evaluating it, and, finally, disconnecting from it (Ravenhill 2008, 207–12). In the critical assessment of their life roles, the vulnerable may attain positions of experts in their own affairs or so-called "experts by experience" (Ravenhill 2008, 211). As such, they can become partners for their professional counterparts, so-called "experts by training" (see Levy and Johnson 2017). These positions allow both groups to cooperate on equal terms, with mutual advice and help given in issues tackled (Levy 2017b). The reflexive flow of ideas and support stimulates the dialogic construction of "peer culture" (Finn 2017, vii). Building on its members' shared mindsets, practices, and emotions (Ravenhill 2008, 182; Johnson 2017, 21), the culture dismantles old routines of social isolation and brings

new creativity of human participation in an integrating community. In effect, the peer discourse contributes to blurring the boundaries between the lay and the professional and, by the same token, between the housed and the homeless. The overall condition of flux in which stories locate their characters makers narration what Middleton calls "journeying dialogue" (2017, 92). Opening to people a multitude of interpretations of their lives, narration offers them creative solutions to their issues.

Changes in interactants' perspectives on the world also belong to the dialogic ways of managing homelessness. This concerns, strictly speaking, developing "common language" (Levy 2017a, 35) or a "universe of language" (Johnson 2017, 16) among all communication partners. The powerful means of such language include rephrasing and "bridging," which involve the use of common words (instead of specialised language), community (simplified) jargon, linguistic playfulness, or expanded definitions of stigmatised terms. Their role is to avoid social categorisation through shared meanings and a sense of acceptance. Such rhetorical mechanisms neutralise issues potentially threatening to the vulnerable by changing/broadening the scope of sensitive topics. Foregrounding more constructive options for difficult matters (Levy 2017c, 80), the strategies reframe the largely fearful and exclusionary visions of the world as seen through the homelessness lens into the more inclusive discourse of social understanding (Levy 2017a, 42; Johnson 2017, 25–36). The bridging effects of such communication involve additionally opening the floor for personal opinions, viewpoints and disagreements. This floor bridges the vulnerable not only with other individual voices but also more broadly with collective institutions. It does so by creating so-called "houses of language" (Levy 2017a, 37–38), where the homeless can feel more "at home" with both others and surrounding systems due their mutual transformation.

4. Dialogic Analysis of Crisis Discourse—A Theoretical Perspective

The interhuman dialogue that the above-mentioned genres initiate subjectifies its participants in at least three ways. Firstly, the generic practices engage both help givers and help recipients ethically to "respond to the call" from others (Marcel 1940; Levinas 1979). The response by the helpers consists in taking action to attend to the vulnerable and in accommodating the helpers' discourse to that of the needy. The response by the vulnerable, in turn, consists in activating their agency and ethical readiness for integrative *re*action in "the sense of being human beings together" (Parker 2020, 147). The first step to this readiness is the disposition of the homeless to overcome so-called "fierce independence," or their (frequent) inhibition against taking anything from anyone (Ravenhill 2008, 208). The subsequent reaction pursues the individuals' disposition to accept the help given as a gift. Thus established, the dialogue transforms not only the subjects interacting, but also their collectives. The former become rightful participants of

communities that themselves change through reflexive amendments of social norms (Erickson 2004, 206).

In what follows, a dialogic analysis is presented of communication around building a "human community" (Arnett 1986) with homeless people in a social institution: a shelter for the homeless in a big European city (Warsaw, Poland). The communication is observed from the perspective of the dialogic model of discourse (DMD; Grillo 2005b), which foregrounds the "participatory" conception of power in social exchange. From this perspective, power exercised *with* another contributes to the formation of "dialogical" social systems, as opposed to power *over* another, which produces "monological" social systems (the "agonistic" conception of power). The former are stimulated by human empowerment, collaboration, and solidarity, whereas the latter are governed by conflict, domination, and inequality (Grillo 2005b, xi). In its search for dialogue as a constitutive aspect of all human communication and creativeness, the DMD inscribes into Arendt's theory of human action (Arendt 1998, 175–247; Grillo 2005d, 6–7). In light of this approach, "a genuine dialogical strategy requires that [communicating agents] act as communicating partners directed to an explicitly common aim" (Grillo 2005d, 14). This, in turn, requires that the common objective becomes a priority for all the actors involved, which means subordinating their private interests to the common vision in the enterprise. Prioritising the parties' common vision entails disinterested action focused on mutual understanding (Habermas 1984, 273–337). In ethical terms, this invites action pursuing a common good with the underlying "logic of gift" (Marcel 1940; Levinas 1979; Ricoeur 1996).

As opposed to instrumental action (with the transactional "logic of economy" and the agonistic conception of power behind it; Habermas 1984, 273–75, 285–86), the action of "giving" is characterised as the so-called "non-possessive" stance on "things" of the world emerging from comprehension and work: issues, topics, ideas, problems, etc. (Levinas 1979, 156–74). When given to the other freely, these things become (without the intention to "grasp" them by particularistic meanings) givens, or Objects[1] open to shared inspection and interpretation (1979, 98–99). This is to say that the condition to free oneself from possession and see things "as they are" is one's disposition to "give" what one possesses. The act of giving assumes admitting the absolutely Other into my world, which means questioning myself together with my possession. Both the admission and the questioning signify the "presence" of the Other in the infinite, ethical mode of *face*. It indicates the Other's own non-possessable identity, deprived of all social attributes, which can suspend possession and initiate the ethical relation (Levinas 1979, 170–71). The latter is where "things given" to the Other become thematised and thereby acquire *Objectivity*. Levinas describes the Object's Objectivity as a form of the Other's "assistance always given to the word

[1] Whenever the term "object" appears in the ethical sense of "offering it to the Other as a gift," thus in the sense of including the Other in its interpretation, it is capitalised to "Object" throughout this essay. The same applies to the corresponding terms of "Objectivity," "Objectification," "Objectify," etc.

which posits the things," or else, as assistance to the proposition given (1979, 97). When a thing is offered, it manifests the one who is signifying, or else "the issuer of the sign, an absolute alterity which nonetheless speaks to [the thinking subject] and thereby thematises, that is proposes the world." As Levinas (1979, 96) additionally explains, the signifying agent, "who emits the sign, *faces*, despite the interpretation of the sign, without proposing himself as a theme." In other words, the signifying one, the Other, "manifests himself in speech by speaking of the world and not of himself; he manifests himself by proposing the world, by *thematising* it."

This takes us to the essence of what the present study frames as "ethical discourse" (cf. Ricoeur 1992) or "ethically grounded dialogue" (cf. Arnett 2018, 277–81). Adhering to the logic of gift, this communication rests on the reciprocity of "giving" and "taking" (see also Burkum 2020, 138). The ethical action in such dialogue, which we call "dialogic action" (Okulska 2016, 2018), follows the communication chain of "attention–response," where both agents "present" their faces to each other (Levinas 1979, 194–97; see also Marcel 1940, 127, 151). In this sequence, attention expresses one's ethical assistance to, or "presence" in, one's words uttered. Moreover, attention communicates also one's ethical assistance to, or presence for, the "call" (for attention/assistance) from the other. The response, in turn, expresses, one's ethical *re*action to attention or the call from the other, whereby it *does justice* to this call (Levinas 1979, 82–84, 100–101). The relation of justice thus established confirms one's *responsibility* for the other, which legitimises the moral bond between the agents and puts them in irreplaceable positions to give the response. Importantly, in articulating the face, both attention and response communicate the "surplus of meaning," or "expression," which is one's infinite and unconditional Desire to welcome what one does not lack in finite terms. In this Desire (contrary to finite needs), one welcomes "the other across themes which the other proposes to [one] or receives from one, without absenting [oneself] from the signs thus given" (Levinas 1979, 97). This is to say that the surplus comes from one's absolute alterity communicated in expression as an inexhaustible abundance of attention given to the other's ethical presence (face) in dialogue. It provides the world "as it is," i.e., in its Objectivity, by "stating" or clarifying it to the other (1979, 97–98).

The surplus is what gives sense to the interpersonal encounter and what also makes the dialogic relation meaningful to its participants (Ricoeur 1976; Gadamer 2003). As a primary generator of all sense and sense-making, the surplus of meaning is an original stimulus to community formation (Levinas 1979, 92, 98). According to Ricoeur (1976, 16), the human experience as lived by people in the intimacy of the ethical encounter becomes public, i.e., is communicated, through its sense, its meaning. But the origin of any practical meaning that surfaces in the pragmatics of social action lies in what Marcel (1940, 104–5, 135) describes as the "recognition" of the other/oneself as "Person." To "recognise" means to acknowledge that before I can belong to/be myself, I acknowledge my openness to/being *with* the other—the absolute freedom I get from them as a gift. "As Person" means recognising the fact that the other is not reducible to a term in the finite, subject–(practical) object system, and neither am I (Marcel 1940, 145–151;

Levinas 1979, 94–96; see also Wojtyła 1979; Ricoeur 1992, Maritain 2015). When posited as a practical object (issue) of my subjective predication, the other becomes only an image/concept derived from/relative to myself—a different term of the same system and a deictic centre of a closed sphere of my own (Marcel 1940, 98–9; Skarga 2002, 55–72; see also Chilton 2004, 48–65). In such a system, the other is split into pieces or reduced to a conglomerate of composite parts, represented in the subject's partial socio-cognitive (linguistic) categories.

Instead, the other is a non-possessable and irreducible alterity that extends beyond the finite subject—an isolated/*faceless* individual. Limited by the causal logic of practical rationality (Habermas 1984, 280–86; Arendt 1998, 144–59), the latter acts purposively upon others, thus instrumentalising them to the means of their centralised predication, which itself becomes the end, or ideology, of such communication (Grillo 2005d, 8–12). As Levinas (1979, 96) remarks, when an issue (object) is posited as a theme given (Object), or when its agent (subject) is recognised as a Person, this is already what begins the chain of signification in its entirety (Marcel 1940, 92–3). The extended series of signifying is not confined to the closed subject–object system. It reaches the ethical sphere, where the other *within* a Person "manifests" their absolute alterity (Levinas 1979, 96). To be sure, manifestation does not signify the other's "disclosure" but is an expression of their ethical presence in discourse. This is because the sign, aside from its signification of the signified (issue) in the practical domain, always signals the signifying (speaker) in the ethical domain. The speaker, however, is not the signified of the sign, as they are in strictly purposive systems, reducing action to its strategic aspect only. In dialogic action, by contrast, "[h]e who signals himself by a sign qua signifying that sign . . . delivers the sign and gives it" (Levinas 1979, 92). So, manifestation is an expression of the other's assistance to *the word* spoken to the other, to a *proposition offering the world*. This is what Marcel calls "engagement" (Marcel 1940, 142–49; see also Marcel 1949, 35)[2] and Gadamer (2003) describes as "the desire" to find the most appropriate word dedicated to someone, both these aspects constituting the essence of living speech and dialogue (16, 40, 102; see also Gadamer 1986, 184–98, 330–60).

What emerges in the act of signifying under the ethical premises is the double movement of intentionality. As Gadamer (2003) observes, it turns out that language goes in two directions: on the one hand, it tries to problematise things, and on the other hand, it withdraws from problematisation/conceptualisation, going back to the binding word, which has the power to absorb them all (65, 71; see also Gadamer 1987, 65–86). It is in this return to the word, to living speech and to the given—Marcel claims (1940, 190–91)—that one recovers "pure intention," a direction in signifying that surpasses the problematised and opens itself to expression. This inward movement of intention in dialogic action changes the quality of the sign itself (Marcel 1940, 92–93). It splits signifying into practical

[2] Although the English translation of Marcel's *engagement* (Fr.) is "involvement," for consistency with the French original, the English equivalent term "engagement" is used throughout this essay.

reference to issues posited in the world by the finite subject (sameness, *idem*) and into face manifestation in the call from/to the other addressed to/by a Person (selfhood, *ipse*; Ricoeur 1992, 115–25). Both these dimensions join in dialogic action, oriented to "solicitude for one's neighbor and . . . justice for each individual" (Ricoeur 1992, 18). It is in this quality of action that issues obtain Objectivity and individuals become Persons. Ricoeur shows how this happens through the intervention of dialogic "narration" (speakers' disinterested action) in conventional "stories" (tellers' practical schemata). When decomposed in narrators' ethical collaboration, faceless individual/social routines transform discursively into living interpersonal dialogue. This transformation contributes to the formation of speakers' personal identity (Ricoeur 1992, 113–39), with "personhood" (*ipseity*) as an ethical indicator of human transcendence and integrity (Wojtyła 1979).

In view of the above, a question arises: "is practical significance the primordial domain of meaning? Does it not presuppose the presence of a thought to which it appears and before which it acquires this meaning?" (Levinas 1979, 94). With the double movement of intention in dialogue comes also the double movement of human thinking that true dialogue and dialogic transformation transmit. According to Levinas (1979), before a sign can refer to its own signifying agent, "it is necessary that the given function as a sign for it to be even given" (92). Put differently, before a given can appear as a sign signalling a speaker, on the one hand, and signifying an Object, on the other hand, there must already be a "face-to-face" relation between Persons. This relation is that of direct contact between absolute alterities that present their faces to each other, despite infinite, unsurpassable distance separating them. It is in this contact across distance that the other's face reveals its dignity and "Height" (superiority) that appeal to one, as a unique and irreplaceable being, for respect and hearing. As Levinas has it (1979), in front of this appeal, expressed by the other's "destitution and nudity," one cannot remain deaf (200). The appeal appoints its recipient to the position of a sole interlocutor who is themselves chosen, and who, by this fact, is given a choice (freedom) to either respond or reject the call (77). Invoking an interlocutor means exposing oneself/the other to the other's/one's own response and questioning. This dialectic of the "Height and Humility" of the other in ethical action is encapsulated, Levinas (1979) adds, in the Desire of the infinite other (200). The dialogic realisation of this Desire is expression, which communicates attention to the other and solicits a response. The latter extends the scope of ethical action to the moral ground of responsibility for, obligation to, and justice with the other (see also Ricoeur 1992, 203–39).

It is thus the attention/appeal to/from the other, initiated in Desire and communicated in expression, which is the beginning of what Levinas (1979) calls "free thought" (200; see also Skarga 2015, 249). Following goodness to promote freedom and truth, this thought combines ethico-moral thinking *with* or *for* the other in dialogue (Marcel 1940, 200–01). Without reducing the other to an end product of thinking *about* them in finite terms, free thinking is correlated also to "pure" or "theoretical" thinking (e.g., Skarga 2002, 109, 117; Gadamer 1987, 65–86; Gadamer 2003, 46). Devoid of strategic interests, it starts with the aforementioned

re-cognition of the other (cf. Marcel 1940, 135), which reflects an original movement of human thought (cf. "*ac*-knowledgement," discussed above) *before* the latter proceeds to cognition, with its practical intention to fabricate ends (Levinas 1979, 76–77; Arendt 1998, 167–74; Skarga 2015, 111). Levinas additionally stresses that "recognition passes necessarily through the interposition of things . . . , and in it [my welcoming the other] the things figure . . . as what one gives"—that is as gifts (1979, 77; see also Marcel 1949, 69). In the theoretical movement, recognition/acknowledgement leads to the constitution of knowledge in its pure, "genuine" sense (Grillo 2005a, 234–35). Rooted in ethics and morality, this knowledge is the origin of all human knowledge and cognition (Skarga 2009, 150–51). It is for this reason that ethics—a source of human experience and consciousness, is referred to as the "first philosophy"—the beginning of all philosophical thinking, including ontology (Levinas 1979, 1984, 1998; Ricoeur 1992; Skarga 2017; Arnett 2022, etc.).

Secondary to ethically motivated thinking (Levinas 1979, 178, 208–9; Skarga 2017, 181) is what Heidegger (1998) identifies as "thinking . . . by and for the truth of being" (240)—"true thinking." Radiating to the ground of ontology, this thinking takes the form of a theoretical movement of "being" towards *thinking itself* reflectively in questions about *understanding* one's selfhood. Addressing the sense and quality of human existence, true thinking raises the problem of humanity, where it narrows the original question about the other's ethical presence in discourse to the question about *I* (*Dasein*): "*Who* am I?" in existential terms vis-a-vis "*What* am I?" in practical terms (see also Marcel 1940, 225; Ricoeur 1992, 56–87; Skarga 2009, 44, etc.). As Ricoeur demonstrates, the dialogic effect of this questioning is the opening of a Person to otherness, recognised in the *uniplurality* of "oneself as another" (see also Arendt 2003). The dialogic construction of personal identity is where ethics links to ontology through the entrance of alterity in what can be called full human "Subjectivity," combining both the other and oneself (Wild 1979, 26–36; Gadamer 1986, 184–98; Gadamer 1993, 350–61; Gadamer 2003, 10, 28–34; Skarga 2009, 188; Skarga 2017, 158–59). One's return in thought to oneself—"the care for being" (Heidegger 1998, 261) is what Heidegger calls "being at home with oneself" or being oneself (1998, 264)—the "essence" of human authenticity and "humanity" (243–49, 268–72). The emphasis that these observations put generally on human self-/other-consciousness in thinking, or self-/other-understanding, draws attention to the fact that thinking is far more than analysis *of* something. Its full scope embraces also thinking towards what, in Heideggerian (1971, 145–61) terms, is *worth* questioning, and questions about this worthiness is what shifts practical analysis to the right track (Skarga 2009, 47). When actualised in social practice, this questioning can transform strictly analytical thinking to one that manifests alterity.

What follows from the abovementioned approaches is that free thinking, in its diversified aspects, is a disinterested human search for truth, clarity, certainty, and concreteness. Its aim is to reveal "what *is*," or things "as they *are*," without distortions and in their essence (Marcel 1940, 81–110, 214–15; Marcel 1949, 69; Levinas 1979, 92–99; Heidegger 1998, 239–49; Gadamer 1986, 232–50; Gadamer 2003, 91; Skarga 2002, 109; Skarga 2017, 142, 165–66). The origin of this search,

Levinas (1979, 92–96) claims, is in the face-to-face exchange of gifts, where it is Persons, not objects, that play the focal role. Attending to each other in mutual giving and taking, the parties construct meanings that surpass those obtained in strictly causal thinking. The participants' assistance to their speech leads to the revelation of the unity between what is said and what is meant. Signalling the speakers' ethical presence in and identification with their speech (Marcel 1940, 125; Gadamer 1986, 330–60; Gadamer 1987, 65–86, 2003, 62), this unity leads to the agents' personal *integration* with their actions and thoughts (Marcel 1940, 125; Marcel 1949, 10–26, 70–71; Skarga 2009, 238, 285; see also Wojtyła 1979, Part III; Ricoeur 1992, 18–19; Grillo 2005d, 37–39). Guided by the presence of alterity, this exchange is driven not by the practical criterion of finality ("success"/"effectiveness"), the causal end of production (Habermas 1984, 281, 285), but by the ethical criterion of "the other," who is the *principle*, not an end, of all dialogic and human action (cf. the *dialogic principle*, esp. Buber 1937; Ebner 1963; see also Arendt 2003: 184–85; Gadamer 1986, 330–60; Gadamer 1987, 65–86; Gadamer 2003, 71, 135; Skarga 2009, 140–41; Skarga 2017, 101).

From Plato to Heidegger, Levinas, and beyond, the flow of pure thinking has been tied to an unrestrained conversation, a dialogue, with the exchange of open-ended questions and answers, whether to another, to oneself, or to thinking itself. As Gadamer (2003) has it, this thinking is indeed a conversation, since one can ask oneself as another person or one can speak to oneself as to someone else (38; see also Gadamer 1993, 350–61). Even in a conversation with another one must be—as long as s/he thinks—in contact with oneself. However, unconstrained by any limits, thinking is endless and can go beyond any human presence. Thereby, it always risks what Kant noticed long ago: the loss of contact with experience—a guideline for a direction and order in thinking (Skarga 2002, 117–23). So, thinking needs principles, which can protect it against going astray. These principles can be found, as Aristotle argues (*Metaphysics*, book VII, 1032b), in reasoning directed at knowledge based on truth. Whereas for Heidegger this truth lies in knowledge derived from ontology, for Levinas it lies in justice derived from morality (for a critique of Heidegger by Levinas, see Levinas 1979, 84–90, 298–99; see also Skarga 2009, 124–25). Following the Levinasian standpoint on "reasoned thinking," thinking *with/for* the other, it is thus the other with their call to responsibility and justice that can arrest the limitless flow of *un*reasoned thinking. As a principle in this flow, the other with their appeal to the face can put a bar on the otherwise faceless thinking *without* the other. The latter's technical direction, visible in strictly practical and intellectual thinking, may pose a threat to oneself, the other and the human community (Skarga 2017, 164–66).

So the promise of all reasoned/rational thinking and dialogue is, as has been mentioned above, the constitution of community *with* the other (Skarga 2015, 101). The roots of this community should not be searched in the plurality of voices that petrify what is commonly said. Neither should they be searched in individual opinions that disintegrate plurality into numerical parts. Both these cases represent different aspects of totality, whose first dimension underpins collectivism and the second individualism. Instead, the traces of the rational community, of uniplurality in the personal–social continuum, lead to thinking

from the particular (individual) to the general (shared), *but* with the necessary observance of discontinuities (cracks/irruptions) breaking the whole (Ricoeur 1992, 197). The gaps opening the whole to alterity can be found in diverse linguistic observations of more or less direct manifestations of the human presence in or assistance to different forms of discourse (for examples, see Ricoeur 1976, 45–69; Ricoeur 2004; Gadamer 1986, 1987, 1993; Skarga 2002, 55–72; Skarga 2009, 74; Grillo 2005c; Okulska 2016, 2018). They all indicate the surplus of meaning whose scope extends the sum of its parts (Levinas 1979, 178; Arendt 1998, 200; Skarga 2009, 72). The assistance to the living word that such instances show already assumes what Levinas (1979) calls "serving the Other" (179).

The examples of the surplus also illustrate moments of the face intervention in social exchange and, by the same token, of human reasoning and sense-making. The function of human reason(ing) lies in the capacity of speaking and thinking to collect, order, and connect into a self-sustainable plurality, or *logos* (Heidegger 1953, 95–102; Skarga 2009, 56). This function also entails simultaneous attention paid in speech to the face and personal uniqueness (Levinas, 1979, 201–4, 216–19). It is these rational qualities that give leeway for the other to dismantle the Said (*dit*) in social practice and transform it to the Saying (*dire*) in dialogue (see Levinas 1998, 5–9, 37–38, 48–51; Arnett 2022, 210–13; Skarga 2002, 55–72). Whenever invoked by the face, *dit* can always change, irrespective of time/space, to *dire*, which surpasses *dit*. This is where Levinas locates the constitution of sense, which reverses the formerly established sense of constitution (Levinas 1979, 127–30, 147). In his view, it is not the ontological constitution of consciousness or sense that enables communication but, conversely, the ethical communication between faces that constitutes all sense and sense-making (Levinas 1979, 98, 203–6; see also Skarga 2009, 142). Departing from disinterested participation of speakers in the ethico-social sphere, this constitution rests on the aforementioned principle of the Other, which gives orientation and direction to meaning (Levinas 1979, 98). It is thus dialogic action and thinking face-to-face that condition the integration of what Gadamer (2003) calls the "community of sense" (108; see also Gadamer 1986, 330–60). Its combined thinking towards personal recognition and self-/other-/world-understanding makes the sense community more broadly an integral dimension of the human, or better, human*e* community (Arnett 1986; Skarga 2009, 2015).

5. Dialogic Analysis of Communication with People in the Homelessness Crisis—The Case of St. Lazarus Shelter in Warsaw, Poland

In what follows, the transformative approach to dialogue (TAD)[3] is adopted (Okulska 2016, 2018; cf. Cloke 2001; Bush and Folger 2005) to institutional

[3] The transformative approach to dialogue is a modified, ethically extended, methodologically revised, and discursively oriented version of the earlier transformative approach

communication between residents of St. Lazarus Shelter for the Homeless in Warsaw (henceforth SLS) and professional staff in charge of this organization, run by the Camillan Welfare Mission. The communication investigated is around an exceptional chain of events that took place at this shelter from 2007 to 2021. It involved the voluntary building of a fully oceanic (two-masted) ship by the homeless from SLS in cooperation with the project supporters: architects, engineers, craftspeople, donors, etc.—altogether about two hundred contributors. The project was initiated by Fr. Bogusław Paleczny (1959–2009), the SLS founder and a shipping enthusiast, and ended on 26 April 2021 with launching the ship into the channel of the Vistula River in Warsaw. This undertaking is perceived in Poland as a symbol of human solidarity, power, and dignity of all the people engaged.

The conversations studied include interviews recorded at different stages of the ship construction, and they are gathered in three video documentaries that serve as linguistic material for this research. The first documentary (D1), *Droga do portu* ["The Road to a Port"], was published by the section *pozyteczni.pl* on the public channel of the Polish TV (TVP). The second documentary (D2), *Bezdomni popłyną w rejs* ["The Homeless Will Go on a Cruise"] was made for the programme *Serwis informacyjny* ["Information Service"] by the private channel TVN24. The third documentary (D3), *Misja statek* ["The Mission 'Ship'"], was produced for SLS purposes and published on the YouTube channel of the video director Paweł Kostowski (2017). The interviewees are the SLS residents involved in the project, the mission's director and social workers, and the ship's captain, craftspeople, and volunteers. The examples analysed are English language translations of their Polish originals (their time locations in the documentaries are provided in square brackets).

It will be shown by means of TAD how the interlocutors' contributions to the documentaries—narratives, recollections, and accounts of personal engagement and collaboration in the construction process—function as testimonies of the people's ethical presence and participation in discourse-mediated dialogic action. Inspired by the "principle" to act across social barriers or divisions, the agents of this dialogue—members of various social groups, come together "face-to-face" to recognise, reflect on, and respond to each other in the context of homelessness in their community. In attending to each other ethically, they also attend to their discourse, which simultaneously transforms the quality of their communication. This manifests in relations of mutual openness, engagement, and respect shaping this exchange, in the growth of the self-esteem, pride, and motivation to arrange local life felt by both the homeless and the professionals, and in a sense of connectedness and understanding spreading across the social networks. The transformation thus observed proceeds reflexively, radiating from a person to the institutions. In the words of Bush and Folger (2005), its premise is the qualitative change of the parties' communication "from a

to conflict (TAC; Bush and Folger 2005), which developed originally in the sociological field of alternative dispute resolution. Proposed by Okulska (2016), TAD was initially referred to as TAC.

negative and destructive interaction to a positive and constructive one—which represents both a private benefit to them and a public benefit to society" (21).

The transformative power of this interaction arises from a "vision of self and society, one based on *relational connection* and understanding rather than on individual autonomy alone" (Bush and Folger 2005, 23–24, emphasis in the original). Advocating a shift in moral vision of society, "from an *individualistic* to a *relational and interactive conception*," this approach strives to uncover dialogic ways to "a full integration of individual freedom and social conscience, in a relational social order enacted through new forms of social processes and institutions" (Bush and Folger 2005, 24). So the dialogic meanings established in transformation not only affect the quality of interaction itself; more importantly, they also change "the mindset of people who are involved in the process" (Bush and Folger 2005, 22). As Okulska shows (2016, 2018), this is mediated through principled communication, whose major *promise*, not a strategic or "non-communicative" aim (cf. Habermas 1984), is to "strengthen both the parties themselves and the society they are part of" (Bush and Folger 2005, 13).

Cloke (2001) further specifies that "[t]ransformation works on the undeveloped, rejected parts of self. . . . [O]rganizational transformation . . . bring[s] group cultures and systems into congruence with the wishes and desires of the people who work in them, who are served by them, and who are the true reasons for their existence" (xiii). Personal transformation, in turn, consists in "helping [people] become more authentically who they *really* are." This implies that "it is not possible to look deeply into others without looking with equal depth into ourselves" (Cloke 2001, xiv). Factual results of this transformation are observed in examples of "people moved to forgiveness and reconciliation, groups revitalized, lives renewed, and relationships reclaimed" (Cloke 2001, xv; see also Okulska 2016, 2018). Such communication requires authentic dialogue, which, in Cloke's (2001) words, "demands openness, honesty, and vulnerability to others. Being vulnerable means risking pain and disillusionment, while anticipating the same honesty in return" (5). Following Buber (and with him also Levinas), such an effort is explained by the common search for truth (Cloke 2001, 10), arrived at relationally in the absolute alterity of and essential interconnectedness between *You* and *I*. The dialogic perseverance to maintain this community is the testimony of the ethical power "to understand . . . the universal beauty of the human spirit" (Cloke 2001, 6).

In line with TAD, the ethical transformation is enacted discursively by two dialogic genres: *empowerment* and *recognition* (Bush and Folger 2005; Okulska 2016, 2018). Empowerment is defined as "the restoration to individuals of a sense of their value and strength and their own capacity to make decisions and handle life's problems" (Bush and Folger 2005, 22). Recognition, in turn, is interpreted as "the evocation in individuals of acknowledgment, understanding, or empathy for the situation and the views of the other" (22). Both these stages of dialogue proceed concentrically, i.e., they do not make a fixed, linear system. Instead, they are used to elicit recognition and empowerment with the hope to encourage interactants to learn from their experience (past and present), and to invoke the parties' "read[iness] for introspection and fundamental change" (Cloke 2001, 11). So the

transformative exchange is integrative in that its participants do not shy away from risks that the dialogue may bring, and they attend to the principle to "reflect on possibilities, based on intuitive assessments at the time" (12). Whereas empowerment consists mainly in the transition from weakness to strength, recognition consists more in the shift from self-centredness and self-absorption to responsiveness to the other (Bush and Folger 2005, 55). In practice (see Okulska 2016, 2018), the former may rely on two kinds of discourse: either it is negative discourse of the past examining (inter)personal weaknesses, deficiencies, and exclusion, or it is positive discourse of the past or future examining the parties' strengths and potential based on historical facts, old experiences, and anticipated hopes. This exploration serves to make the parties ready for openness to, acceptance of, and recognition of the other(s) and/in themselves. The latter, in turn, relies more on positive discourse of change "here and now," of novelty and of principled inclusion. They all mediate qualitative transformation in three basic spheres of human experience: identification, relations, and knowledge (Habermas 1984, 309).

To follow discursive traces of transformation in these areas, the dialogic moves of empowerment and recognition are subdivided into three analytical categories of action oriented to reaching understanding (Habermas 1984, 286–95). These categories include, respectively, expressive (self-related) action (E), relational (self–other-related) action (R), and epistemic (knowledge-related) action (K). Without reducing themselves to teleological activities (Habermas 1984, 288), all these moves combine in action used *without reservation*. It can be recognised by the fact that "the speaker means nothing else than the literal meaning of what he says" (Habermas 1984, 294–97). In pragmatic terms, this points to the congruence in this action between locutionary and illocutionary acts (Habermas 1984, 283). In ethical terms, this means nothing else than, as has been shown in Section 4 above, the speaker's personal assistance to and presence in their own words. This assistance can additionally be traced in ethical requirements underlying the three subtypes of dialogic action, which are expected to follow the conditions of rightness, truth, and truthfulness. Moreover, the speaker's attendance is signalled in their selection of "a comprehensible linguistic expression only in order to come to an understanding *with* a hearer *about* something and thereby to make *himself* understandable" (Habermas 1984, 307, emphasis in the original). This description highlights the speaker's disinterested *care* in the choice of linguistic tools for mutual interaction and the author's effort to build interpersonal connection also through the topics *offered* for deliberation. The parties' attitudes toward the topics raised invoke again the Heideggerian question mentioned above about the worthiness of themes undertaken in dialogue and of their integral bonds with Persons giving them in speech (see also Gadamer 1993, 350–61; Gadamer 2003, 31).

5.1. Empowerment Genres of Dialogic Action

The empowerment stage (henceforth EMP) of the dialogue between the SLS residents and staff, as recorded in the documentaries on the construction of the ship *Fr. Bogusław* (named after the project's founder), runs through sequences of

attention and response related to the speakers' past and future experiences as well as to their (inter)personal identities and relations. These include thinking with others (K-EMP) through the discursive mediation of past events and future expectations, revivals of ethical bonds (R-EMP) between the current interlocutors and those who have already gone, and also the tellers' own returns to selfhood (E-EMP) through engagement with others via participation in the shipbuilding. All this happens with the issue of homelessness in the background and is undertaken with the hope of transforming all sides of the local community towards mutual acceptance, principled inclusion, and ethical integration. This means recognition by *all* the sides of their own and others' deficiencies and potentials as well as a change in their discourses: communication and practice in a way that can accommodate all the community members.

When it comes to the K-EMP in the SLS dialogue, it proceeds through the parties' externalising shared Objects of speaking (cf. Winslade and Monk 2000, 6–8). This Objectification consists in thematising without reservation common topics of past events and future hopes, which are exchanged by the parties as gifts for mutual consideration. It also consists in examining working inspirations for the present community as thoughts and ideas passed to them from other (old) community members. Additionally, the K-EMP runs through the speakers' thinking processes of self-reflection and self-understanding influenced by ideas and events carrying traces of "face-to-face" encounters with others. All these mechanisms are enacted despite and beyond the homelessness issue, which is assumed as an open topic that can be tackled freely at a convenient time when the parties gain sufficient power from the ongoing dialogue.

The externalisation of Objects given in the SLS discourse takes place through thematising the topic of the ship itself and of the people's efforts put to its building. Example 1 below illustrates a conversation between Captain (Waldemar Rzeźnicki, hereafter C) and one of the shelter's residents (R1), who recall together past phases of the project realisation.

(1) D1 [00:11–00:35]

1. C: **The cranes** we welded ourselves. Do you remember the crane for pouring lead, for lead?

2. R1: Oh gosh! [*laughter*]

3. C: **Nine tons of lead** we poured in here. There were stories. And we got so much engrossed in this construction work that we nearly forgot that **she** [the ship] **was about to sail**=

4. R1: =**this** is coming very soon=

5. C: =that **this border** is is very close.

The parties' engagement in this topic (*the cranes*) is seen in the high level of their determination to reach out to each other's faces. Discursively, this is transmitted in R1's emphatic reaction (in Turn 2) to the details provided by C (Turn 1) about

the way the construction crew, including R1, made the cranes for building the ship. C's desire to attend to R1's face can be read from the former's encouragement for R1 to contribute to the topic. C does so by developing further details about the construction work (Turn 3): *Nine tons of lead*; *she [the ship] was about to sail*. He gets the desired response from R1, who in the cooperative Turn 4 (its latching with the contiguous turns is marked with =) expresses his enthusiasm about the time proximity of the ship's release.

The thematization sequence above features the growth of tension in both participants along the whole topical section of Example 1. This is observed in C's reference to the team's *engross[ment] in this construction work* (Turn 3) and in both C and R1 complementing each other's words across Turns 4–5. The narrative reaches its peak in C's last utterance (Turn 5), marking the topic closure by returning to the main theme in the metonymic anticipation of the ship finalisation (*this border is is very close*). Such references to the common positive experiences from the past and to the common expectations in the future allow the parties to give each other the meanings shared as gifts. The speakers' dedication to weaving this theme jointly may indicate their attempt to empower each other/themselves for personal assistance to the turns uttered. The dialogue thus arising enables the parties not only to make sense of the issue posited, but also to think together towards mutual recognition of each other's partnership and alterity. In attending to each other's presence throughout this discourse (manifested in the use of the inclusive *we*), the parties empower each other epistemically by extending their practical knowledge of everyday experience to the acknowledgement of their own and each other's understanding as humans.

The contribution of the K-EMP to the growth of reasoned knowledge *with* the other in dialogue continues also in Example 2 below. The excerpt provides C's assessment of the ship's condition in its raw stage. The linguistic reference to the historical authorship of the "ship" idea and to the decision made years ago to follow this inspiration can be described as a recollection of an earlier response of the SLS community to Fr. Paleczny's face (*After Fr. Bogusław Paleczny's idea, . . . she was decided for building*). C's factual declaration (*we have pulled her to this condition*) that the project makers (*we*) have all fulfilled *Father*'s legacy so far functions here as a K-action empowering the speaker dialogically for continuing this undertaking. As such, the K-EMP has the role to maintain the speaker's Desire to meet Paleczny's face again.

(2) D1 [00:43–00:57]

C: **After Priest, actually Fr. Bogusław Paleczny's idea**, eleven and a half years ago eh **she was decided for building**. **Father** died one and a half years after starting the construction, and **we have pulled her to this condition**.

In the ethico-moral sense, what C is additionally doing via his K-EMP in example 2 is preparing himself for a judgment by a recipient (Bogusław Paleczny) fully legitimate to measure C's responsibility (cf. Levinas 1979, 84, 101). Similarly to the preceding example, the "ship" project thematised here functions dialogically as an Objectified intermediary to reconstruct what Grillo (2005a) calls "genuine

knowledge" of the participants themselves and of their humanising world (234). The time-crossing epistemic bonds that C is trying to reestablish discursively between his own face, the faces of the community represented, and the face of the person who has left his legacy empower the speaker to invoke the characters' presence and participation in this narrative. He perseveres to revive them through the topic flow across four points in time: voicing the "ship" idea, the decision to build the ship, the proponent's death, and the project realisation up to the moment of speaking, all serving as the K-gift shared between the parties mentioned.

The K-EMP evidenced in the theme of the shipbuilding develops further to the R-EMP moves of the dialogue between the SLS residents and professionals. In her narrative of Fr. Bogusław's life history provided in Example 3, the mission's director (Adriana Porowska, hereafter MD) recounts past events to search for Father's contributions to the fate of homeless people (*He . . . noticed people who are hungry*). She does this to empower herself through her relation to the historical figure, whom she sets as an example for both the SLS community and other helpers in the homelessness crisis. Closing her narrative with the moment of the SLS foundation, MD builds a coda between the relations from the more remote past and their outcome in the nearer time distance (*so, St. Lazarus Shelter came into being*). The attention paid to people's efforts to run SLS empowers her to turn her own attention to the plight of homeless people in general.

(3) D1 [02:00–02:28]

MD: **He** [Fr. Bogusław], as a young boy, seminary student, walking through the Central Railway Station in Warsaw, **noticed people who are hungry**. And first, **he gave them his sandwiches**, he simply made more and more of them, and then, **together with nuns, they cooked soup and distributed it** in the Station's vicinity. He also saw that **most of these people simply needed eh institutional, shelter help**, and **so, St. Lazarus Shelter came into being**.

The shift of attention is expressed in MD's understanding of homeless people's needs, which she verbalises by paraphrasing Fr. Bronisław's words: *most of these people simply needed eh institutional shelter help*. By looking at the homeless through the eyes of the SLS founder, MD invites not only Fr. Paleczny's face but also the faces of the vulnerable. Thereby, she opens herself to the presence of these faces in her own discourse. Additionally, Example 3 demonstrates MD's listening to the appeal by other helpers in the homelessness crisis (*nuns [who] cooked soup and distributed it*). The communicative practice of active listening in dialogue (Winslade and Monk 2000, 140–43) empowers the listener, MD in this case, to reflect the voices heard, together with their actions, in her discourse. Confirming the importance of the helpers' contribution to the shelter foundation, MD expresses her readiness to respond to the call addressed to her for the mission's continuation. Articulated from the position of the mission's head, such a signal can be read as MD's participatory R-EMP to serve others.

The promise arising from the R-EMP towards a response from the homeless people themselves can be traced in the SLS residents' narratives of their agentive reactions to the invitation to join the project of the shipbuilding. Example

4 illustrates a response of the shelter inhabitant R2, who shares with the Interviewer (Ir) his enthusiasm (*I fell in love . . .*) and long-term attachment (*I could stay on the ship all the time, all year long.*) to the communal action (inclusive *we*—Turn 3) of building the ship.

(4) D2 [01:52-02:00]

1. R2: **I fell in love** completely. **I could stay on the ship all the time, all year long.**

2. Ir: Where have you sailed?

3. R2: **We** were in **Gotland, we** were in **Lithuania**.

Foregrounding by R2 the pronoun *I* in his discourse (Turn 1) implies the ongoing E-EMP, which consists in retrieving by the man agency during his participation in the shipbuilding. R2's use of the past tense and hypothetical mood in attending to his own subjectivity (*I fell in love*; *I could stay*) may indicate the resident's EMP for self-understanding. The memories that he provides of sea routes traversed with companions (*we*) on the ship (Turn 3) testify additionally to R2's pride and joy of his maritime achievements. The growth of self-esteem that the sense of pride releases (visible in R2's smile when he is speaking) may be an outward sign of R2 enacting the E-EMP for his self-transformation in community with others.

5.2. Recognition Genres of Dialogic Action

The REC stage of dialogue consists in reaching out to others/self "here and now," and similarly to the EMP genres discussed above, it often takes place through the mediation of Objects given. The moments of facing true otherness confirm the agents' welcoming and internalising alterity in their discourse practice. The dialogic integration with others/oneself in communication manifests the process of ethical transformation going on in people. In phenomenological terms, the REC moves indicate transcending the time perspective of the past and future and entering the ethical dimension of the "face-to-face" in the present. In discursive terms, the REC genres proceed in what Winslade and Monk (2000, 86–89, 161) call "unique outcomes," understood as qualitative speech acts that initiate creative and novel interaction with others. The transformative endeavours in the ethical sphere have their concrete participatory realisations in the social sphere (for the philosophical background of "concreteness" in dialogue, see Marcel 1940, 81–110). They are evidenced in the growth of speakers' personal identities (E-REC), in principled redefinitions of social relations (R-REC), and in humanised understandings of communal lifeworlds (K-REC).

Beginning with the K-REC, the dialogic activities of this type include speakers' attestations to new visions of reality emerging from Objectifying narratives. Processing the topic of the ship again in a different conversation (Example 5), MD testifies to the fact that the result of the community's effort *is now working, and accomplishing [its] mission*. The activation of reasoned knowledge in

this move can be noticed in MD's description of the role that the ship is already playing in the SLS's life: *her role is to change the way of thinking*.

(5) D3 [01:51–02:06]

MD: Frankly speaking, **she** [the ship] **is now working, and accomplishing her mission**, as **her role is to change the way of thinking**. We don't collect money for the shipbuilding. **We help homeless persons**, and it is **the help for homeless persons that we collect money for**. And the ship is built in such a way that **we collect materials**.

The transformation that this passage mediates consists in expressing concrete acts of service that the community members, especially the SLS staff and supporters, currently perform: *We help homeless persons*; *we collect money*; *we collect materials*. The use of the inclusive *we* demonstrates the simultaneous process of community building in the local context (R-REC). The present tense and agentive meanings of the predicates *help* and *collect* communicate the agents' personal engagement and ethical presence in these practices (E-REC). The coalescence in this example of the K-REC genre of dialogic action with the R-REC and E-REC genres suggests the speakers' ethical integration going on live in this discourse.

The SLS community's K-REC of the impact they have on human minds elicits an overt response from the SLS residents. In Example 6, they cooperatively express the R-REC of support experienced at the shelter. R3's appreciation of the help received from others (Turn 1) transforms to R4's R-REC of the Desire to give this help back (Turn 2). In recognising the good obtained from others (*karma*), R4 simultaneously recognises his own Desire (*is coming back*) to reciprocate this good. It is noteworthy that R4's R-REC of other faces here leads him to the parallel understanding of his own humanity (E-REC): *Today you help me, tomorrow I can help you*. Moreover, the personal statement that R4 gives on the reciprocity of helping (*if you don't help anyone, you shouldn't count on someone else's help*.) resonates with the K-REC by MD from Example 5 above. R4's stance expressed in Turn 2 (*I think, . . .*) can be treated as his positive response to the K-appeal from the other (MD) to reflect on one's "way of thinking."

(6) D1 [04:56–05:29]

1. R3: Surely, many families in Poland are not so **well off as we are here** from this side.

2. R4: As they say it, ***karma karma karma* is coming back. Today you help me, tomorrow I can help you**. This is a different situation. If nobody, **I think, if you don't help anyone, you shouldn't count on anyone else's help**.

3. R3: So, **we have to help each other**, because **if we don't help each other, it would be bad**.

Example 6 additionally shows that the R-REC of the other spreads in this dialogue from R4 onwards to R3. The latter includes himself in R4's response (Turn 3) by taking on the same position. R3's moral judgment of behaviours lacking

reciprocity (*if we don't help each other, so it would be bad*) may indicate the manifestation of his own face (E-REC) in transformation proceeding towards severing ties with the isolating practices described. Similarly to R3 and R4, also another resident of SLS, R5 from the next example (7), enacts both the R-REC of the other and E-REC of his selfhood in the ongoing transformation. R5's use of deontic modality (*have to*) to express the necessity to reciprocate the help received from others (R-REC) actualises his self-consciousness (E-REC) that he is chosen by his helpers as a unique and irreplaceable Person to respond to the gifts obtained.

(7) D1 [06:00–06:24]

R5: I was raised in such a spirit that **if I get something** from somebody, some goodness, something, **I then have to reciprocate, have to give it back** in return. I obtained such goodness from Fr. Paleczny, who took me from the Central Railway Station, sixteen of us. From these sixteen **I'm the only one to be alive**. And **I'm happy** that God has given me such a chance, and took me right here.

As R5 conveys in the past tense, the R-EMP section of this account, one of such gifts that he got in his history from the SLS founder is his own life. The gratefulness that he expresses at the moment of speaking to both Fr. Paleczny and God for saving his life invokes again his personhood, actualised in the E-REC of himself with others.

The inseparable links that hold between R-REC and E-REC in dialogic action take us to additional illustrations of the E-REC move proper in the SLS exchange. As has been shown in the preceding examples, the occurrences of E-REC tie up with moments of self-recognition in discourse. This usually results from earlier processes of thinking with others, which in the case of E-REC is redirected to oneself, who is treated as another (Ricoeur 1992; Arendt 2003). Put differently, E-REC involves mechanisms of self-reflection and self-understanding, which confirm the process of ethical transformation going on live in one's personal sphere. The last two examples (8–9) from the SLS documentaries present accounts by two participants of the ship project: SLS resident R6 and a volunteer (V)—a joiner making wooden parts for the ship. They both testify to the principled change happening in them as an outcome of their participation in the shipbuilding and, by the same token, in the community's life.

Discursively, the transformation proceeds through unique outcomes expressed in the present tense developing new options that emerge in these people's lives. The alternatives emerge in creative discourse practices and lifestyles that open to the speakers qualitative ways of living in contact with themselves, with others, and with a sense of what they do. In other words, what is going on in this transformation is acquiring for the interlocutors an understanding of their world.

(8) D2 [00:51–01:06]

R6: Instead of sitting and looking thoughtless at the TV screen that someone turns on for me, and chooses a programme, as this is a collective, right hm, **I**

> **prefer to do this** [shipbuilding], **where where at least I will complete hm I will complete some of my mental tasks**.
>
> (9) D1 [07:31–07:43]
>
> V: I hope that we'll go by this ship for a long journey, across the oceans, so **my work is not in vain. I'm buying this!**

The transformation is observed in the speakers' choices, by means of the E-REC, of new discourse practices formulated as unique outcomes expressing creativity and novelty in the interlocutors' decisions. For example, in Example 8, R6 expresses his preference to work on the ship (*I prefer to do this*) over the old habit of remaining an agentless individual within a collective. In Example 9, in turn, V expresses dedication to and self-fulfilment in his work on the ship (*my work is not in vain*), derived from his hope to experience unusual adventures at sea. Both speakers build their understanding of the new life plans by linking these prospects to their personal growth and integrity: *I will complete some of my mental tasks.* (Example 8); *I'm buying this!* (Example 9).

6. Conclusions

From what has been said above, it emerges that the use of ethically grounded dialogue for communicating in homelessness has a strong potential to initiate qualitative change in speakers' personal and social practices. In parallel with earlier findings on the use of dialogic interaction in social crises, the transformative approach to dialogue, with its ethical background, has demonstrated that modern homelessness, ensuing from the mutual isolation of the housed and homeless populations, can be responded to in interaction that addresses peoples' ethical Desire. The extensions of this Desire in social life can be traced in basic human needs, such as acceptance, security, and respect, which signal voices appealing to alterity. The ethical response to these voices conditions the growth of personal identity and communal solidarity. The dialogic analysis of the transformative genres of empowerment and recognition in the interaction at St. Lazarus Shelter for the Homeless in Warsaw, Poland, has shown the process of ethical transformation proceeding in the discourse and experience of participants involved in the shelter's collaborative project of the shipbuilding. The conversations with the ship builders, who come from various social backgrounds: the SLS residents and staff, as well as the project's designers, managers, and volunteers, uncover the ongoing process of recognising, responding to, and understanding alterity in this exchange. In discoursal terms, the transformation is observed in the gradual integration and principled inclusion of the Other in these people's personal and communal narratives. In social terms, it means accommodating the Other in the speakers' individual behaviours and cultural patterns. The communicative outcome of such transformative dialogue is the development of agentive, participatory, and humane ties in the community's network. The micro-study of lay–professional encounters over the issue of homelessness in the Polish context can serve as an illustration of ethically inspired

human power that can be actualised in dialogue locally to challenge the more global phenomenon of homelessness around the world.

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Dialogic *Gravitas*: Catholic Horror Fiction and Dialectical Discourse

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Abstract: This article examines how fictional dialogues within the Catholic horror literary subgenre can nourish dialectical habits of mind for readers—and foster the seriousness of philosophical and theological discourse. Specifically, the article traces how dialogue evokes the classical virtue of *gravitas* via the genre's style and substance. To highlight the approach, the article briefly explores several examples of such horror literature, including J. K. Huysmans's *Là-Bas* (1891), Georges Bernanos's *Under the Sun of Satan* (1926), and William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971). It concludes that Catholic horror literature's dialogic *gravitas* can play an important ethical role in teaching, moving, and delighting audiences—Catholic or otherwise—toward dialectical modes of discourse. As such, dialogic *gravitas* can help remedy the dangers of oversentimentality and post-truth relativism that have emerged more fully in the 2020s.

Keywords: dialectic; literature; Catholicism; dialogue; rhetoric

In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Kenneth Burke (1941) famously proclaims the literary arts as "equipment for living" (304). As part of this equipment, fictional dialogues can model how human beings productively and ethically discourse. By engaging the imaginations of readers, literary dialogues invite a potential for dialectic, or what Burke (2018) defines as "competitive cooperation" (98) whereby characters volley ideas back and forth, aspiring for truth. While not as overtly philosophical as dialogues from philosophers like Plato, Cicero, or Erasmus,[1] modern novels' dialectical dialogues may model how this dialectic unfolds in more organic manners than outright philosophical dialogues. As such, dialogues in modern novels can robustly cultivate readers' ethical and productive dialectical habits of mind.

Within literature, dialectical dialogues serve the poetics and the rhetoric of texts. Fictional dialogues offer something more than mere entertainment, yet they

[1] Some modern authors also write philosophical dialogues in the spirit of Plato, such as Iris Murdoch and Peter Kreeft.

also offer something more than mere cognitive exercises. Rhetorician Richard Weaver ([1964] 2006) reminds us that "activity"—or "not merely cognition"—is an important goal of being alive; and in the Platonic tradition, rhetorical communication concerns motivating the will, not merely instructing the intellect (64-65). Therefore, we should not only consider the internal cognitive elements of the dialectic but also outward rhetorical extensions of the dialectic. After all, if we neglect rhetorical implications and overemphasize cerebral approaches, we can diminish the role played by actual audience members (64–65). To that end, literary dialogues can, to quote Weaver, "move men's feelings toward a goal" and concern matters of common experience (63). The fictional story itself acts as part of this common experience since, through readers' imaginations, they can experience what characters experience. Such experience cooperates—and does not overturn—readers' reasoning. According to Weaver, *skilled* poets or writers of fiction "show reasoning power enough for their poetry and contribute something to the mind of which dialectic is incapable: feeling and motion" (Weaver 62). While dialogues found in literature offer imaginative fabrications (after all, characters' literary speech in novels and short stories is often cleaner than real world speech), such fabrications can provide models of dialogic architecture, spirit, and content. As models, they serve the persuasive *officia oratoris*: to delight, to teach, and to move. Effective dialogue delights readers to want to read the dialogue; it teaches readers how to dialogue well; and finally, it moves readers to dialogue in a similar manner as the fictional characters after they leave the fictional world and engage with the real world.

Aesthetic distance separates readers from the imaginative world expressed in the work. Depending on the work and the reader, wide or narrow gaps can form between the fictional world and the actual world, and between readers' imagination and their active lives. Kenneth Burke points out how reader escapism can problematize the rhetoric. As an example, Burke (1941) gestures to self-help books: "The reading of a book on the attainment of success is itself the symbolic attaining of that success. It is while they read that these readers are 'succeeding'" and "make no serious attention' to apply the book's recipes" (299). The same can apply to dialectical dialogue in philosophical literature. For instance, readers can read Plato's *Crito* and internalize the energy of effective dialectical dialogue by vicariously living through the character of Socrates; thusly, readers may feel like they have somehow spoken a dialectical dialogue while they in fact "make no serious attention to apply the book's recipes" in the world. By reading a dialectical dialogue, readers may deceive themselves into feeling like they have been an active party in a dialogue—and accordingly, they feel satiated. Because readers feel that they have productively participated in dialogue, they may not be motivated to apply Plato's Socratic Method or dialectical reasoning to conversations within their own life.

This real-world neglect of dialectic is where the fictional genre—in this case, supernatural horror—can play a vital role. Via the imagination, contemplative supernatural horror fiction demands serious attention to apply the book's "recipes." That is, the horror commands and evokes *gravitas*. Horror stories,

that is, artificial stories of fear,[2] evoke Weaver's actual "feeling and motion." Specifically, supernatural horror stories place audiences in grave imaginative environments compounded with high stakes and attention directed toward metaphysical concerns: serious orientations toward *pietas* and *virtus*. Due to horror's severity and depictions of suffering that evoke fear, the genre demands *gravitas* more than other genres. The stories' dialogues play pivotal roles in fostering that *gravitas*.

This article suggests that an often-overlooked subgenre of horror literature—that is, *Catholic* horror literature—provides insight into how to foster habits of serious dialogic discourse as modeled (and rhetorically communicated) in the literature. As an orthodox Christian denomination committed to, and influenced by, the classical Greek and Roman traditions that celebrate the dialectic and the virtue of *gravitas*,[3] Catholic horror literature invites audiences to similarly nourish habits of ethical and effective interpersonal dialogue. These habits can extend to all audiences: Catholic or not Catholic, religious or areligious. The literature directs readers toward a wider philosophical engagement with truth and ideas—and summons them into the rhetorical and dialectical space between extreme relativity and extreme dogma.[4] Specifically, I argue that horror's explicit dialogic seriousness elevates the stories beyond entertainment. Such seriousness moves readers toward philosophical orientations and the according dialectical habits that fuel such orientations. After discussing *gravitas* and defining "dialogic *gravitas*," I briefly outline how dialogue and *gravitas* operate in three Catholic horror novels: J. K. Huysmans's *Là-Bas*, Georges Bernanos's *Under the Sun of Satan*, and William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist*. Finally, I discuss how the horror genre contributes to social, ethical, and pluralistic truth-seeking discourse. Ultimately, horror storytelling—and its according dialogic *gravitas*—can be valuable in today's age that suffers from emotivism and overly-relativistic attitudes which dangerously undercut philosophical inquiry.

Dialogic *Gravitas*

Gravitas can be defined as seriousness. More specifically, it recognizes the grave importance of particular ideas that should be taken seriously. While seriousness can sometimes be disregarded as a virtue in the modern world, the virtue of *gravitas* pervaded ancient Roman thought and culture. For example, Cicero (1913) notably discusses *gravitas* in Book One of *De Officiis*. He argued that rulers should command serious demeanors and embrace the role of responsibility (97). He further discusses how public officers must conduct themselves with dignity,

[2] For this article, horror stories are defined as stories that evoke fear—per the definitions of Stephen King (*Danse Macabre*, 1981) and Douglas E. Winter (*Prime Evil*, 1988).

[3] C. S. Lewis's *The Discarded Image* highlights the roots of Platonism found in Roman Catholicism—and its according commitment to metaphysical realism. These roots and commitments still prevail in Catholicism today.

[4] This sentiment is shared by classically minded rhetoricians such as Mortimer Adler and Richard McKeon.

virtue, and seriousness to fulfill their duties effectively (97). Additionally, Cicero (1928) champions the seriousness of Natural Law. In *De Legibus* he explains, "Law is the highest reason, implanted in Nature, which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite" (317). In *De Natura Deorum*, Cicero (2000) explains that piety, as well as Natural Law, is a serious duty. Therefore, people have the responsibility to take metaphysical orientation seriously—not through mere superficial play-acting and empty ceremony. Cicero explains that piety "cannot exist in mere outward show and pretense," and if piety, reverence, and religion disappear, life would become "a welter of disorder and confusion" wherein loyalty, social union, and justice would likewise disappear (7). In this ideal way, *gravitas* and *pietas* cooperate.

Schools of Stoicism probably most famously endorsed the virtue of *gravitas*. In *Meditations*, Roman Stoic ruler Marcus Aurelius (2003) celebrates "gravity without airs" when writing about his teacher Sextus (7). His phrase captures the Stoic ideal of maintaining a serious, dignified demeanor without frills or arrogance. It suggests that a natural weightiness of character comes from inner strength and self-awareness rather than external posturing. Accordingly, Marcus Aurelius and other Stoics, like Epictetus and Seneca, privileged philosophy: the inner life over individual passions. By emphasizing reason and virtue over fleeting desires or impulses, Stoics aimed toward states of composure and morality that naturally rest on *gravitas*. Furthermore, Stoics emphasized contemplation of one's moment of death, or *momento mori*, which serves as a powerful tool for cultivating *gravitas*. Regular reflection on life's finitude helps foster humility, reduce attachment to trivialities, and develop a sense of urgency in living virtuously.

Both Ciceronian and Stoic *gravitas* take seriously the human concordance with reality. The seriousness of reality translates into Christianity, as well. Catholic fiction's universal themes quest toward objective realism or what Russell Kirk (borrowing from T. S. Eliot) calls "the permanent things." And this realism is far from saccharine. As Anglican writer Dorothy Sayers ([1941] 1987) aptly shares in *The Mind of the Maker*: "The proper question to be asked about any creed is not, 'Is it pleasant?' but, 'is it true?'" (16). She explains that Christianity is compelling "not because it is the most cheering view of man's existence but because it is truest to the facts." She specifies, "It is unpleasant to be called sinners, and much nicer to think that we all have hearts of gold—but have we?" (16). Furthermore, Kirk ([1969] 2016) notes that ever since the stories of Job and Homer, literature has always sought to form a "normative consciousness" that seeks to "teach human beings their true nature, their dignity, and their rightful place in the scheme of things" (31). Not all of those natures and realities are comfortable. The virtue of *gravitas* is a part of this classical normative consciousness. And through the Christian lens, it is far from simple. It involves seriously accepting God's creation and one's place in it. It acknowledges the real while simultaneously conforming the mind and heart to the true. Ultimately, such proportionality, or *consonantia*, symbiotically connects readers to the art and, by extension, to the wider *kosmos*. Such cosmological concord stimulates aesthetical satisfaction and delight.

From this perspective, literary *gravitas* seems to oppose playfulness. However, it offers more than a hardline bifurcation. After all, seriousness and

playfulness can cooperate. Philosophical literature often combines serious philosophy with playful storytelling. But the horror genre's playfulness is not merely innocent fun; it is ironically delightful because it engages readers with bristling suspense and tension—and the according catharsis. Ultimately, horror is a serious genre that draws audiences' attention toward mortality. Horror provides a narrative home for the seriousness of Cicero, the austerity of the Stoics, and Christian spiritual realism. And supernatural horror specifically orients readers toward the seriousness of metaphysical reality or *pietas*. Because horror storytelling can be raw in its depictions and subject matter, it follows Marcus Aurelius' suggestion to be "without airs." Of course, such *gravitas* requires that the depictions are not merely performative "shock for shock's sake" which would conversely undercut the contemplative role of horror in the story. Instead, it nourishes philosophical questions and serves to texture the inner life of characters. As catalysts of fear, mortality and suffering incite meaningful thinking and motivate characters toward serious action based on that deeper thinking. From this perspective, readers can witness characters vibrate between contemplation and action—and, via character-surrogates, readers can imaginatively participate in a similar type of vibration.

Yet, the genre's magic can be found in its imaginative—albeit dark—kind of playfulness that widely appeals to audiences. As horror theorist Matthias Clasen (2017) posits in *Why Horror Seduces*, horror audiences know that horror's fictional frightening situations are simulated "play behavior" (58–59). Resembling nightmares where individuals eventually wake up in the comfort of their own beds, horror fiction allows audiences to experience danger and fear without facing actual consequences. At the same time, Catholic horror keeps audiences close enough to the aesthetic that the fiction does not compromise its seriousness. That is, the horror attracts enough audience buy-in that they do not think the story is laughable or mere fantasy. Both these playful and serious ingredients mix into a rhetoric: one that instructs and moves but also entertains. Ultimately, any play within horror stories behaves as a rhetoric of irony. Horror stories are not either playful or serious. Nor are they partially playful and partially serious. Instead, horror stories' imaginative playfulness exacerbates their seriousness. Horror storytelling resembles a game that becomes more fun when taken seriously and played with a straight face. According to Soren Kierkegaard's ([1989] 1841) *The Concept of Irony*, irony provides a phenomenon or appearance that contradicts its essence (247). In the spirit of irony, an imaginative story may playfully craft adrenaline-fueled fictional phenomena, but its essential meanings and universals seriously correspond to actual reality. Once someone recognizes that a nightmare is a nightmare, they do not usually laugh it off. They may awaken from a nightmare knowing that it was an unreal nightmare, but maybe they are still emotionally rattled by the seriousness of the underlying truths about reality communicated by the nightmare. This type of ironic dynamism energizes the stories and awakens readers to serious attitudes about serious things.

The serious dimension of fictional dialogue within these horror stories—or dialogic *gravitas*—helps balance poetics with dialectic and cohere it into such a rhetoric. In many ways, dialogic *gravitas* resembles the classical dialectic. After all,

dialogic *gravitas* offers serious dialogue where two or more characters pursue truth through reasoning. But unlike philosophical dialectic, dialogic *gravitas* is elevated by the story, characters, and genre. Unlike strictly philosophical dialogues, dialogic *gravitas* more robustly commands feeling. While the content is serious, grave feelings are cultivated when readers identify with character-surrogates who fight to return order to their worlds. Apart from the cosmic pessimist variety of horror stories (those inspired by the philosophies of E.M. Cioran, such as some of Thomas Ligotti's stories), many horror stories are not merely tales of hopelessness and despair. Therefore, while the philosophical dialectic can seek order by resolving opposites through dialogic intellectual exchange, protagonists in horror stories confront nefarious opposing forces and seek order through dialogue, as well. Through social communication, protagonists better understand the truth, defend the truth, and decide upon good actions. Moreover, these dialogues are situated in plots where fictional threats are felt by readers. These identifiable feelings of fear (without despair) within the dialogues help close the aesthetic distance between reader and the text. To this end, dialogic *gravitas* within horror helps readers take truth and goodness seriously—and not fall into despair. In sum, horror's dialogic *gravitas* extends toward the ideal which, as Weaver ([1963] 1985) explains, "only the intellect can understand and only the soul can have affection for" (82). As a rhetoric, it offers intellectual, dialectical dialogues with soulful poetics superadded.

Naturally, all dialogues evoke some sort of feeling—even philosophical dialogues. Some dialogues—while pursuing truth—offer moments of levity. Plato's *Phaedrus*, for instance, feels lighthearted in the first third of the dialogue when it appropriately discusses erotic love. Plato's *Ion* reads as lighthearted because it brims with jest and sarcasm. However, Plato's *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, and *Phaedo* offer much more dialogic *gravitas* because the dialogues' contexts and situations color them with serious states of peril. *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, and *Phaedo* demand more seriousness than much of *Phaedrus* or *Ion* not only because they robustly explore the topic of death, but also because of scenes (involving Socrates in prison), circumstances (involving Socrates about to charged or put to death), and characters (involving Socrates who is about to die). In Plato's *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, and *Phaedo*, the dialectic, rhetoric, and underlying story, all row in a particular direction: toward seriousness in relation to mortality. The dialogues can have narrative consequences—specifically, their outcome can help save Socrates from being executed.

Darker and more poetical than Plato's dialogues, horror novels can offer fertile fields of dialogic *gravitas* that can engage readers more holistically than stand-alone philosophical dialogues. Novels more fully engage the senses (through the imagination) in addition to the will and intellect. Engagement with the senses offers extra layers of communicated *gravitas*. After all, in reading a novel, readers imaginatively transport themselves into scenes that concretely involve danger, suffering, and death. In short, even dialogue-heavy scenes in horror novels often involve action in respect to plot, whereas Plato's dialogues only minimally use action and plot, if at all. Novels' scenic dimensions are often richer than strictly philosophical dialogues. A novel's dialogic scenes are

embedded in longer narrative experiences, which—if the novel effectively depicts its characters' psychologies—readers become empathetically invested in characters' journeys and root for protagonists to achieve their goals. Ultimately, novels do not necessarily replace philosophical dialogues; instead, novels are visceral arenas wherein philosophical dialogues can contextually unfold. A novel's dialogic *gravitas* not only engages the intellect in a similar manner as philosophical dialogues, but a novel stimulates emotion and engages the senses; therefore, a novel's dialogues rhetorically engage the whole person.

Burke (1941) explains that certain genres like tragedies, comedies, and satire act as "equipment for living" because they "size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes" (304). In this list of genres, Burke does not mention the genre of horror. But horror is a genre, nevertheless. So, what are horror's corresponding attitudes? In his *Poetics*, Aristotle (1995) explains that effective tragedies evoke powerful emotions of fear and pity and involve depictions of suffering and death (69–71). Although modern horror stories differ from classical tragedies, Aristotle notes the importance of the darker narrative ingredients, which (arguably) later evolve into the modern horror story.[5] From this perspective, horror storytelling can be seen as a species of the genus of tragedy.

If horror offers a more severe species of tragedy, it arguably requires even more *gravitas* than then typical tragedies. Steeped in *gravitas* rather than levity, serious tragedy is the opposite of levity-fueled comedy. Due to its darkness, some critics, Christian or otherwise, may see horror as damaging—perhaps even dangerous to readers. They may not see the benefit of *gravitas*-heavy horror since it may lead audiences to into despair, nihilism, or apathy, and away from the *eudaimonia* found in the cultivation of virtue. Scott Woodcock (2013), for instance, asserts that the horror film, specifically with violence and gore, erodes sympathy; therefore, it is morally unacceptable. Yet, as Ian Stoner (2020) points out, horrific and violent dimensions have always pervaded storytelling (515). Among the examples Stoner provides, both Euripides' *The Bacchae* and Homer's *The Iliad* are relevant since they promote ancient wisdom and virtue (515). While it is true that modern horror novels' horror sequences may be more suspenseful and experiential than Greek epic and tragedy horror sequences, suspense is not altogether absent. Suspense can even be found in messenger characters' reiterations about off-stage actions. While stories-within-stories may not evoke as much affect, they still offer experiences of horror—especially if stories-within-stories are detailed and patiently told by characters. For example, in lines 1041 through 1152 of Euripides' (2005) *The Bacchae*, the Messenger reiterates how Pentheus climbed a tree to spy on the camp of Maenads which included his mother Agave; eventually, Pentheus was discovered, knocked down from the tree, and his mother and other Maenads dismembered him, scraped off his skin, and played in

[5] While horror theorist Noël Carroll resists a connection between classical tragedy and modern horror in his book *The Philosophy of Horror*, Terry Heller emphasizes this connection in *The Delights of Horror*. This article leans toward Heller's perspective.

his blood (155–58). Agave finally impales her own son's head on her holy wand "as if it were a mountain lion's head" (Euripides, 157–58). Because the Messenger witnessed the atrocities first-hand, he patiently recounts the sequence of events using descriptions and even dialogue. Ultimately, his retelling is tense: it offers incremental suspense as well as a horrific conclusion. Unlike Euripides' tragedy, the horror of Homer's epic, *The Iliad*, does not rely on messengers relaying stories of horror. Its horror is often driven by tension rather than suspense. For example, in Book 21, Achilles is chased by Scamander, the river god, because Achilles has clogged up the river with corpses. This scene provides a monstrous chase scene of supernatural dread; after all, it conveys a rare instance where Achilles' genuinely seems threatened. While both Euripides and Homer's scenes of horror certainly provide what Aristotle calls "spectacle," both scenes are not extraneous; both scenes work toward the unity of the compositions; the scenes serve the plots which ultimately lead audiences to wisdom and morality.

While mean-spirited horror film and literature certainly exists, to cancel an entire genre ignores the constructive dimensions of the rhetoric. Such cancelation mistakes the trees for the forest. After all, horror fiction and its appropriate dialogue work dialectically. Kenneth Burke (1941) provides a glimpse into this dialectical relationship. In a rare moment where Burke discusses dark literature, he explains, "A book wholly constructed of the repellent may partially close the mind to the repellent"; such writing might therefore cause readers to develop a "psychological callus, a protective crust of insensitiveness" (241). To avoid such an outcome, Burke proposes an alternative method of engaging readers through the genre of horror: "Horrors strike deeper when they strike out of a sweet and gentle context. . . . And when they do strike, note how they strike: for one has been responding to the humanity of humans; one has been warmed; one presumably is aglow" but then the feeling may be "blasted into hell" (241). He does not promote that horror should repel readers and drive them into despair; rather, as a thinker who appreciates classical dialectic, he promotes that it should work dialectically. The work should oscillate between gentle tenderness and harsh reality.[6] Effective and ethical horror, like classical tragedy and classical dialectic, cannot end with complete closure and full human understanding. While some plotlines may be resolved, the overarching metaphysic still sits outside of human understanding: a formalism of substance that humbles the audience while also affirming the metaphysical. Dialogic *gravitas* operates within this framework and contributes to the celebration of philosophy and theology within dark literature—that is, a celebration of the discomforts of *agnosis*, never reaching fully rational certainty.

Catholic Horror Literature

William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* begins "sweet and gentle" from which its horrors are told and emerge. On the other hand, the existential frustration of J. K.

[6] This relationship is exemplified in some dark literary Catholic fiction which may not be traditionally classified as horror literature, such as the work of Flannery O'Connor.

Huysmans' Catholic horror novel *Là-Bas* and the gritty darkness of Georges Bernanos' novel *Under the Sun of Satan* embrace moments that are "blasted into hell." These three Catholic horror novels offer a spectrum of horror tragedy to consider. By placing these novels in conversation with one another, we can better understand the nuances of dialogic *gravitas*. The novels extend across eighty years: from 1891 to 1971. The first novel emphasizes dialectical dialogues' pluralistic role. The second two novels spotlight conversations with demons and devils.

The following survey of literature traces dialogic *gravitas* through crucial textual moments. The survey displays dialogic *gravitas* across several works, rather than only one novel, to establish dialogic *gravitas* as a trend in Catholic horror literature and not simply a single author's unique approach. Therefore, while each of these novels can certainly be literarily analyzed with more depth, a deeply literary approach sits outside the scope of this article. In short, the following survey provides glimpses into how dialogic *gravitas* can—and does—unfold in Catholic horror narratives. Hopefully, the survey sparks future conversations about relevant intersections between rhetoric, dialectic, and poetics.

J. K. Huysmans's Là-Bas

Huysmans' 1891 novel *Là-Bas* (*Down There*) begins the "Durtal" series of four novels (which include *Là-Bas*, *En Route, The Cathedral,* and *The Oblate*), in which the character of Durtal, a Parisian author, slowly converts to Catholicism over the course of the novels and eventually moves from Paris to a monastery. As the first part of this sequence, *Là-Bas* is the precursor to the conversion. The novel follows Durtal as he finds spirituality in the wrong places—specifically, Satanism. Upon visiting (and immediately leaving) a Black Mass in Paris, he eventually realizes that Satanism is fundamentally wrong. His later spiritual conversion emerges from a recognition that the civilized world is becoming Satanic. Disillusioned with cosmopolitan corruption, Durtal recognizes that the spiritual naturalism of the Middle Ages was more truthful than modern schools of materialism and relativity. Durtal draws these conclusions throughout the novel's philosophical and dialectical dialogues—and converts in the novels proceeding *Là-Bas*.

Là-Bas's characters are intricately woven into the introspective fabric of the story. Each character adds depth and complexity that heightens the novel's *gravitas*. Through different characters and their dialogues with Durtal, Huysmans explores themes of spiritual decay and redemption that highlight Durtal's inner conflicts. But ultimately, the novel offers a type of pluralism. And dialogue plays an important role in this pluralism. Specifically, the novel features an array of diverse perspectives from a range of disparate characters in conversation with one another—all pursuing meaning with varying degrees of spiritual overlap. For instance, Durtal seeks solace in the macabre as he academically researches the notorious murderer Gilles de Rais for his book. Durtal's obsession with the historical figure's atrocities mirrors his own spiritual crisis, which helps Durtal wrestle with decadence, diabolism, and redemption. Therefore, in a way, he cerebrally converses with this historical figure. Additionally, Mme. Chantelouve, Durtal's mistress, entangles him further into the dark underworld of Satanism. She

embodies both seduction and spiritual corruption. Her duality reflects the conflict between Durtal's yearning for purity and his descent into darkness. Such reflection is demonstrated via their dialogues. Thirdly, Durtal is friends with Des Hermies, a physician who is fascinated by the occult, who offers a rational yet deeply cynical perspective on the human condition. Through their conversations, Des Hermies serves as Durtal's trusted guide through the esoteric and forbidden. And finally, there is Carhaix, the church bellringer, who provides a contrasting voice of unwavering faithful Catholic tradition amidst Durtal's spiritual crisis. Carhaix's steadfast Catholicism contrasts—and thusly highlights—the spiritual void in the other characters' lives. In sum, Durtal's philosophical conversations with this cast of characters—some bad, some good—help eventually move him toward edification.

The novel's conversations do not include much levity. In fact, the last lines of the novel communicate some of the novel's most grave themes. For instance, the very last line is spoken by Durtal to Carhaix and Des Hermies, saying, "They (Parisians) will stuff their guts with food and evacuate their souls through their bowels" (Huysmans [1891] 2001, 265). The novel does not end with optimism or conversion, but instead, it ends with Durtal's frustration with the damnation of Parisians. *Gravitas* can be found in Durtal's *agon* with Parisian society, his yearning for truth, and his strong (albeit nascent) orientation toward *pietas*. Much like Dante's pilgrim in the Divine Comedy, *Là-Bas'* Durtal faces the horrors of interacting with evil people before he eventually turns toward the True, Good, and Beautiful. And like Dante's pilgrim, part of Durtal's process is dialoguing with the "damned."

Georges Bernanos's Under the Sun of Satan

Under the Sun of Satan, a 1926 novel by Georges Bernanos, illustrates the profound spiritual struggles of Father Donissan, a rural French priest. The narrative explores themes of sin, redemption, and the eternal battle between good and evil. Distressed by unworthiness and doubt, Donissan encounters Satan in various forms, which leads to intense internal and external conflicts. Through patient and haunting prose, Bernanos presents a moving portrayal of the human soul's quest for salvation amidst the shadows of despair and temptation.

Before introducing readers to Father Donissan's transmundane interactions, Bernanos begins with scenes that showcase how evil operates within mundane rural dialogue. These early scenes feature a sixteen-year-old girl named Mouchette whose frenzied, manic, and lying behaviors may suggest demonic possession—although readers are not given any explicit evidence of supernatural intervention. Ultimately, Mouchette's scenes provide dark entry points into the novel's dialogic *gravitas*. While her interactions do not yet involve the supernatural, they showcase how unethical characters may manipulate other unethical characters who are not spiritually fortified. For example, in an opening scene in the novel, a pregnant and defiant Mouchette sneaks out of her house under cover of night to confront the womanizing Marquis who has impregnated her. Ostensibly, she seeks to assure him that she has kept his secret from her father.

But it quickly becomes clear that she does not seek to persuade or seek truth in the dialogue—but to play via lying. Yet, she lies not to protect herself or to manipulate for gain. She lies simply for the pleasure of lying. To Mouchette, "Each falsehood was a fresh delight, which tightened her throat like a caress; that night she would have lied despite insults, despite blows, to the very peril of her life; she would have lied for the sake of lying" (Bernanos [1926] 2017, 37). The verbal game spirals into confusion for both the Marquis and readers. Mouchette's lies multiply, disorienting and destabilizing the conversation until it becomes a maze of shifting claims. Her words, like her intentions, are slippery. The frustrating game reaches a brutal climax: she takes the Marquis's own gun and shoots him in the face at point-blank range.

Following the murder, she visits her doctor, Dr. Gallet, to discuss the pregnancy and her potential courses of action which include abortion and suicide. But, once again, the encounter becomes a performance. Despite the doctor's resistance to her seductions, she toys with him through language, innuendo, and contradiction—like she had with the Marquis. The dialogue, once more, becomes erratic and difficult to follow, not only for the doctor but for readers as well. Her reasoning shifts mid-sentence; she oscillates between coyness and fury. In an unsettling admission, she says that she is "crazy," questioning if she is "man or beast." (Bernanos [1926] 2017, 47). She insists that such animalistic unpredictability makes men desire her—and yet, it is the same bestial nature that undercuts any possibility for constructive dialogue.

In these scenes, Mouchette's speech is not a means of communication but a weapon of disrupting the pursuit of truth. As a maenadic character, Mouchette fractures conversations into a series of ambiguities and impulses where logic and dialogue become impotent. Though the Marquis is certainly unethical, Mouchette's amorality runs deeper—not only in her actions, but in her very mode of conversation. Her violence is not merely physical, but a destabilizing verbal force. Through her, the novel presents a vision of moral and disintegration that is connected to active dialogic confusion. Resembling an approach often seen throughout the work of Flannery O' Connor (who was influenced by Bernanos), readers are shown what dialogue looks like when it lacks goodness. The horror that unfolds from the absence of goodness ironically orients readers toward the grave need for goodness to guide social communication.

Under the Sun of Satan shifts away from townsfolk drama and toward the transcendent when it illustrates the spiritual trials of Father Donissan. While the intersection between spiritual warfare and dialogue can be traced throughout the novel, it can be specifically highlighted in one harrowing scene between Father Donissan and the Devil. One night, while Father Donissan walks down a countryside road, the Devil, disguised as a friendly horse dealer, converses with Donissan. The Devil showcases his magical prowess and weaves webs of lies. Not naturally eloquent himself, Donissan "had long suffered from the inability to express what he felt"; his communication was burdened with "clumsiness" that was peppered with long stretches of silences (Bernanos [1926] 2017, 94–95). Still, when conversing with the Devil, he surprisingly speaks words inspired by God, a testament to his inner resolve where even his silences communicate rhetorical

power. The priest remains steadfast and serious despite the Devil's laughter and mockery. In an act of courage, Donissan eventually runs at the Devil, only to fall through the phantom onto the ground unconscious. Upon awakening on the side of the road, he (and readers) becomes uncertain if the diabolic encounter was real, a bout of madness, or a mere dream. This ambiguity draws the reader into Donissan's tumultuous spiritual experience driven by both *virtus* and *gravitas*.

The dialogue between Donissan and the Devil highlights the stark contrast between Donissan's earnest truth-seeking and the Devil's playful spectacle. Bernanos emphasizes the gravity of Donissan's spiritual journey. After all, Donissan courageously confronts the evil head-on in a profound act of faith—and does not let the Devil's playful speech and insidious demonstrations corrupt or tempt him. Bernanos' Donissan offers an example of *gravitas* at work, rather than play, within the narrative. Through this tense dialogue, he places readers in that *gravitas*.

William Peter Blatty's The Exorcist

It is unclear whether William Peter Blatty was influenced by Bernanos. Nevertheless, *The Exorcist* bears striking similarities to Bernanos' work, particularly in *The Exorcist*'s dialogues between Father Damien Karras and the demon Pazuzu (the demon who possesses the 12-year-old Regan MacNeil's body). The exchange echoes the Devil's conversations with Father Donisson in *Under the Sun of Satan*. Both sets of conversations highlight the demon's tendency to trivialize the seriousness of truth and goodness. For instance, early in *The Exorcist*, a psychiatrist hypnotizes Regan and prompts "the person inside of Regan" to speak (Blatty [1973] 2004, 140). Here, Pazuzu tells the truth in these dialogues, but it codes its answers, playing with the psychologist. For example, when the psychologist asks, "the person inside of Regan" "where do you come from?" Pazuzu answers, "Dog" (Blatty [1973] 2004, 140). When the psychologist specifies, "You say that she comes from a dog?" Pazuzu follows with "Dogmorfmocion" (Blatty [1973] 2004, 140). The hypnotist does not understand that Pazuzu is speaking in code. Pazuzu is speaking backwards; Dogmorfmocion is a mirrored, backward code for "No-I-com(e)-from-God" (Blatty [1973] 2004, 140). Pazuzu inverts the letters of the words. The message of the phrase is technically true—but the rhetoric requires that the truth be decoded. Much like early Sophists, the demon is playing language games rather than taking truth seriously.

Reciprocally, the psychologists never take the demon seriously, as well. They see Regan's possession through a lens of behaviorism rather than a grander spiritual reality. Moreover, they offer their own type of game—hypnotism—to draw out the truth by manipulating the girl's unconscious mind. In this scene, the demon doesn't take scientists seriously—and the scientists do not take the demon seriously. Consequently, the truth is never understood because proper *gravitas* is not consulted.

Unlike these early games between the demon and psychologists, Father Damien Karras is a serious man—and while he wrestles with a crisis of faith throughout much of the novel—he represents *gravitas* through the intersection of

reason and faith, science and religion. Much like the devil's tactics toward Donissan in Bernanos' *Under the Sun of Satan*, Pazuzu mocks sacred rituals and manipulates Father Karras with insidious lies. Here, Pazuzu admits that "the devil likes liars" (Blatty [1973] 2004, 263) and "I *do* like to playact" (Blatty [1973] 2004, 265). For example, the demon pretends to be other people by manipulating its voice. It pretends to be Karras' mother as well as Burke Dennings, a character who the demon pushed out of a window to his death earlier in the novel. Ultimately, Pazuzu manipulates Karras' psychology by play-acting and deceiving Karras away from truth-seeking. The demon deliberately turns a serious dialogue into untruths and play. But coached by the stoic priest Father Merrin, faithful Father Karras commits to the *gravitas* and dialogically perseveres out of love.

The novel's underlying irony between play and seriousness pervades the novel. Not only does it operate between Pazuzu and Karras, but it is also ironically found in Regan MacNeil. As an innocent and playful girl, she becomes a vessel for the demon's corrupt and malevolent games. Through Pazuzu's conversations with the psychologist and Karras, Blatty delineates two forms of play: one innocent and one evil. But of course, they are not so easily parsed out. After all, Regan becomes possessed when she "plays" with the Ouija board presumably to have innocent fun; and the serious demon possesses her and turns her into a game to manipulate. This contrast mirrors Bernanos' exploration of earnest spiritual truth-seeking and the Devil's deceitful games. Both novels feature not only playful diabolical spectacle but playful diabolical dialogue. The playfulness contrasts the seriously pious characters. Karras, who revives his faith when encountering the demon, combats diabolical play with truth-driven *gravitas*. He directs himself toward *pietas* and dutifully saves Regan through courageous action.

Conclusion

Like classical tragedy, horror fiction offers literary suffering that points to the wider *kosmos*. Both characters and readers march through arduous landscapes in pursuit of understanding. Much like Dante's pilgrim in *Inferno*, the novels' protagonists do not merely *witness* horrific spectacles, but they dialogue with evil to better understand it, combat it, and then avoid it. Through characters' dialogic interactions, readers also better understand and battle with evil. This dialogic approach is seen not only in Dante's *Inferno* but also in *Là-Bas*, *Under the Sun of Satan*, and *The Exorcist*. All the while, authors act as ethical guides—akin to the character of Virgil—to guide readers through the horrors and help readers internally dialogue with good characters and not so good characters. In the three novels, the authors' consciences speak through devout Catholic characters, such as priests, who dialogue with various characters in the novels, including one another. These devout characters help anchor the dialogues and stabilize the story with faith and reason.

Suffering within Catholic horror literature may confuse audiences—but the suffering is ultimately connected to love, reality, and sociality. In a letter to French writer Frederic Lefevre soon after publishing *Under the Sun of Satan*,

Georges Bernanos (2022) writes, "The problem of Life is the problem of Suffering" (3). He explains that some people think that he is "serving Despair" from his "platter of hell" (9). But Bernanos insists that he writes to incite "excessive terror from hatred of sin"; therefore, he looks to move readers toward Goodness with his fiction. Certain readers yearn for suffering, he claims, because suffering is the "bread that God shares with man" (9)—and, as such, it leads to love. Bernanos explains that we cannot live outside of reality. This reality does not only consist of privileged moments of intellectualism, sensualism, or even vague religiosity; rather it also consists of a "deep expanse of suffering that suddenly bubbles to the surface like water from an underground river" (10). Consequently, horror literature helps readers resolve this loving suffering in a social manner. Readers witness dialogic human-to-human sociality on the page; they thoughtfully befriend characters in their imaginations; and they even befriend the author through the literary rhetoric of the author's creation.[7]

From a rhetorical perspective, the reading of Catholic horror literature is a social act—and, ironically, an optimistic one. A novel's dialogic *gravitas* supports that optimism. It counters positions from post-structural theorists like Friedrich Nietzsche and Georges Bataille who, in their atheistic frameworks, promote laughing at a godless void as a source of humanistic optimism.[8] Rather, Catholic horror gestures to optimism in substance, namely God and Being—and the journey to better understand such substance. Therefore, as the three novels evidence, Catholic horror's seriousness is far from pessimistic. Both tragedy and horror paradoxically point at the joy of truth, which can be joyful in its severity. Tragedy and horror gesture to candor—an important part of truth-seeking communication[9]—rather than saccharine sentimentality that may immediately gratify audiences. In *Ideas Have Consequences*, Weaver ([1948] 2013) warns us about similar problematic sentimentality and its "hysterical optimism." Such sentimentality is problematic because it lacks candor and its associated *gravitas*. Weaver argues that recognizing tragedy can provide a remedy. He writes that sentimentality will continue "until the world again admits the existence of tragedy, and it cannot admit the existence of tragedy until it again distinguishes between good and evil" (10). Almost forty years later, Allan Bloom ([1987] 2012), refines this perspective in *The Closing of the American Mind* when reflecting on younger generations who do not take evil seriously. He shares that many young people in his time (that is, Generation X) did not know or believe in evil (67). They believed in "evil deeds, not evil people" that could be quickly resolved. In other

[7] See Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) for more.

[8] Nietzsche—and later thinkers like Georges Bataille—favor the playful Dionysian (rather than the serious Apollonian) as means to deal with the nihilistic negativity when there is no God. For example, in the section "On the Higher Man" from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche (1899) writes "Man must become better and more evil,'— thus I teach. The evilest is necessary for the best of beyond-man." (430). Soon after, he writes: "Learn, I pray, to laugh beyond yourselves! …The laughter I have proclaimed holy. Ye higher men, learn to laugh!" (439). Similarly, many post-structuralists who riff off Nietzsche do not seem to take contemplative truth-seeking—and by extension, philosophy in its traditional sense—as seriously as pre-modern thinkers.

[9] See Plato's *Gorgias* 487a for a specific look at candor.

words, Bloom recognizes the more recent trend to hop over the discomforts of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* and seek to immediately arrive at a new version of *Paradiso* without much effort (67). People seek to laugh their way beyond good and evil—and leapfrog over truly dialectical dialogue.

Works of horror literature—specifically the dialogues found in Catholic horror literature—seek to heal this breach and return readers to dialectical habits of mind. Horror literature takes the time to dwell with good and evil, the physical and the metaphysical. The storytelling takes both elements seriously in a complex, not naïve, manner. Taking cues from Plato, Catholic horror uses dialogue to grapple with such complexity in patient philosophical and theological manners. As a result, Catholic horror fiction—and its respective dialogues—immerse, teach, and orient modern readers toward concordance with reality and the grander *kosmos*.

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