

## A Conversation about Communication Ethics with Ronald C. Arnett

*How did you become interested in studying communication ethics?*

I have two answers, with one being more personally interesting. I completed my Ph.D. at the age of 24 and as I sat in my first faculty meeting, the faculty seemed incredibly old. They were all around 45 or 50. At that moment, Don Sikkink, who is a wonderful man and who had just turned 50 that day, made me think: "I can't believe I'm sitting in this room with this person who is twice my age plus." (Now I am 52—God's revenge.)

Don began talking about a course he was teaching that dealt with ethics and free speech. His comment was, "You know, the course is just not going very well. I prefer not to teach it. Who could teach that course instead of me? Perhaps, ah ... the youngest." He pointed at me and I responded, "Oh, what a wonderful opportunity!" My introduction to communication ethics came from Don Sikkink. Only later did I know the care and wisdom of that call to responsibility. I am grateful.

The more serious answer is that out of the turmoil of the 1970s, I was involved in the anti-war movement. I worked with students at St. Cloud State University to start a group called NOVA, "Non-Violent Alternatives." My first book was *Dwell in Peace: Applying Nonviolence to Everyday Relationships*. Much of my work at that particular time engaged questions of nonviolence. At that point, the major work in nonviolence was by Gene Sharp who was doing strategic nonviolence as a way to deal with military defense. We brought him to campus and began a "Nonviolent Alternatives" week of speakers and events.

In addition to that, I was interested in the work of Mahatma Gandhi and the notion of *satyagraha*, differentiated from *duragraha*. *Duragraha* is stubborn persistence. *Satyagraha* is dialogic nonviolent change. In *Dwell in Peace*, I examined connections between Martin Buber and Gandhi, knowing that the letter exchanges they had were somewhat contentious. At one point, Gandhi was asking Buber to utilize nonviolence against the Nazis and received the comment from Buber that such action was impossible. However, there are important connections between their callings, including the fact that neither *satyagraha* nor dialogue are possible as unreflective techniques unresponsive to the historical moment.

I had a great deal of interest in the area of communication ethics and very little formal education. My impulse was to go in and look at what Albert Schweitzer called the sanctity of human life, or the sacredness of life, which

was one of the major themes of *Dwell in Peace*. I began teaching that ethics and free speech course, pretty much like the majority of my courses, as a learner beginning with questions and seeking temporal answers. I center learning as an “ironical foundation” of a postmodern age of narrative and virtue contention. Learning is the central communication ethics principle in such an era, with engagement of difference becoming a postmodern barometer of “common sense.”

*Who are some of the key figures who influenced your work in communication ethics?*

There are many; the lineage begins with Bobby Kennedy when I campaigned for him locally in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I witnessed in him what Aristotle called “a commitment to the ‘good.’” Postmodernity reminds us of the complexity of “goods,” but this does not reject, nor de-privilege, the importance of temporal discernment of a given “good.” Postmodernity assumes the loss of one universal “good” and lives within the tapestry of multiple social “goods.” The second major influence was Martin Luther King, Jr. He united the narratives of a faith story and democracy, reminding us of a call to responsibility to the Other, not just to me or my kind.

The third major influence was people in the anti-war movement. The most important person to me, philosophically, in the anti-war movement was John Howard Yoder. John Howard Yoder was a Mennonite who eventually taught philosophy at Notre Dame. Another person of great importance was Dale Brown, who wrote the foreword to my first book, *Dwell in Peace*. He was director of a peace studies program at Bethany Theological Seminary. I have a Master’s of Divinity from Church of the Brethren seminary in peace studies. Additionally, my friend Tom Hurst, who was the director of a group called On Earth Peace, has been an important influence. Tom has been an inspiration since our undergraduate work at Manchester College.

Another influential person was our campus minister at Manchester College, Robert Kuneckle. During the summers of my undergraduate experience, I visited and discussed books on peace that we read together. We went through numerous books during one summer and more the next. He provided a safe place to read and study. Perhaps I actually began my scholarly career in his office.

From that sense of welcome, I stumbled from the work of Mahatma Gandhi to that of Martin Buber simply because I was at Manchester College,

where the oldest peace studies program in the world was established, and sitting in the classroom with one of the founders of interpersonal communication connected to dialogue, Paul Keller. He was just a wonderful and patient human being; he introduced me to the connections between Buber and Gandhi and to the importance of communication students' reading literature. Much of my career direction lives within his care and guidance.

Then I went to graduate school at Ohio University. I just talked to a colleague today, and I've never thought about one fact until today—my dissertation committee was composed of three Manchester College graduates. Ray Wagner directed my thesis and dissertation; he is one of the finest educators I have ever known. Paul Boase, the director of the School of Interpersonal Communication, was on my committee; I later roomed with him at conferences for over 20 years. We also asked Paul Keller to join as an external person who was not at Ohio University to be on that committee. In short, I had a committee composed of only Manchester College graduates, two of whom were conscientious objectors, and the dissertation was, of course, on nonviolence. I was too young and naïve to recognize how incredibly unusual it was to have those three people from the same undergraduate campus on my committee. They were simply wonderful. Ray Wagner's thoughtful care kept me in the field, and his friendship, along with that of Paul Boase, provided a sanctuary for me for many years. NCA was a return to a sense of home when I roomed with them. They were simply gracious to me.

My work received a jump start in a conversation with Stan Deetz (another Manchester College and Ohio University graduate). Stan said, "Do you want to be known as a Buber scholar?" I said, "No." He then said, "Then you can never stop reading." I am still reading and learning ...as I tell students, there is much joy in not knowing and in seeking temporal answers. Since that moment, Hans-Georg Gadamer has guided me in reflecting on dialogue as ground with bias and prejudice. I returned to Aristotle because of Gadamer. I stumbled my way into critique of agency through the work of Christopher Lasch. Recently I finished a book on Dietrich Bonhoeffer that assisted in bringing the question of conviction to a world of difference.

Now my conversation turns to Albert Camus, Hannah Arendt, and Emmanuel Levinas. Albert Camus permits me to investigate anew the importance of existentialism in times of narrative fragmentation. Hannah Arendt opens the question of public and private, differentiating public and private space. She gives us insight into the "banality of evil" in taken-for-granted assumptions that accompany modernity: the blurring of public and private

and the presupposition of progress. Once you give up the presupposition of the inevitability of progress, then you need to reclaim public and private space as a natural dialectic that calls into account the undisputed authority of the “social” or popular consensus. This dialectic guided Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his writing and struggles against the Third Reich. As a genuine aristocrat, Bonhoeffer had a private life that permitted him to critique the public framework that sustained Nazi Germany. His life and work provided me with a tempered read of an aristocratic upbringing. The differentiation of public and private space is essential in an era of contention and difference.

The most important read for me currently is Emmanuel Levinas. I have written a couple of essays on Levinas. I am not ready to write a book on Levinas; his work represents a major conceptual and cultural leap. I consider him the scholar who most strongly critiques the West’s mistaken view of identity. Levinas is the most important philosopher I have ever encountered in my professional career. The reason is the issue of agency. He has the strongest sense of self, the most powerful view of agency of any author I have ever read. The “otherwise than convention” question is, “How does he get there?” His understanding of agency is derivative, not originary. He offers a responsive “I” rather than the agency of an “I” that imposes willfulness upon the world. The notion of “call” is fundamental to Levinas; his ethics begins with a voice other than our own. Additionally, the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Seyla Benhabib, and on a personal level the work of Dorothy Day, keep me in conversation and attentive to temporal moments of insight in an era of confusion and wonderful opportunity for learning.

*How do you define communication ethics?*

In the field of communication, communication ethics centers around one major action metaphor: choice. I would suggest that the notion of choice begins with a given “good” we want to protect and promote. We choose a philosophical standpoint that privileges a given sense of the “good.” For instance, a democratic ethic protects individual input and influence and a narrative understanding of communication ethics protects a given story. The work of James Chesebro and, later, my own work point to differing communicative categories that protect and promote a given sense of the “good.” Chesebro’s work addresses democratic, universal, and contextual communication ethics, along with codes and procedures, with my work adding

narrative and, in a current project co-authored with Pat Arneson and Leeanne Bell, adding dialogic ethics. Communication ethics is the carrying of a given sense of the “good” into personal and professional life; it impacts what we see and do and, most importantly, what we privilege.

*Do you prefer the term “communication ethic” or “communication ethics”?*

Only recently did I begin to differentiate between the terms “communication ethics” and “communication ethic.” In an essay I wrote for Sharon Bracci and Cliff Christians, I differentiated “a communication ethic” from “communication ethics.” Communication ethics is a multiplicity of communication ethic positions, each of which recognizes a bias or ground that promotes a given sense of the “good.” In my work, there is no such entity as “the communication ethic” with the power of a universal claim; each ethic presupposes what Jürgen Habermas outlines as a bias of “interests.”

In my most recent book on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I look at the interplay of rhetoric, dialogue, and dialectic in a communication ethic. Dialectic takes us to texture missed by modernity, as Hannah Arendt penned in her rejection of the “social,” the blurring of public and private communicative life. Dialectic is the first check on communication ethics. Checked confidence permits one to make a dialogic move, which requires one to understand the ground upon which one stands and then to learn and understand the ground of another. Emergent insight comes from the “between” of ground or narrative bias. The prescriptive move of communicative ethics is rhetorical. Calvin Schrag outlines the inevitable nature of a rhetorical turn. I do not discuss these in linear fashion, however, because our very first choice of a “good” that we seek to protect and promote is a rhetorical move. Emmanuel Levinas reminds us that ethics are descriptive and prescriptive. He thought “otherwise” than the modern project of universal truth.

I work with the assumption that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is tied to the metaphor of “learning,” not to the metaphor of “knowledge”—the notion of knowledge is a 20<sup>th</sup> century metaphor. The 21<sup>st</sup> century metaphor of “learning” means that whatever I know must engage and risk being reshaped in a given moment. My interest in dialogue ties to the importance of “learning” that is historically engaged. However, as stated earlier, dialogue begins with narrative ground that has bias and prescriptive vision that both sharpen and limit our insight.

Emmanuel Levinas's emphasis on the descriptive and prescriptive required me to stress "dialogic confession" as a postmodern metaphor attentive to communication ethics. To confess one's ground carries with it a dialectical responsibility to texture understanding, to continue to learn, and to acknowledge one's bias and prejudice. There is no way that I can work out of a communication ethic that does not have a persuasive framework. Once you leave modernity and the presupposition that I can stand above history and look down upon another or an event, as if somehow I am a non-biased objective agent, confession takes on pragmatic currency in a communication ethic.

This privileged view of one's own insight contrasts with Alasdair MacIntyre's disdain for emotivism, decision making by personal preference. In her interview with you, Julia Wood talked about Sandra Harding's view of standpoint theory. This socio-cultural insight confronts us with difference. Together the insights of emotivism and standpoint inform communication ethics. Emotivism is a modern temptation when the demand for constant learning from differing standpoints, narrative structures, and encounters with a given historical moment gives way to the fatigue of the familiar.

Perhaps the philosophical movement to understanding each communication ethic as protecting and promoting a sense of the "good" started with existentialism. I view existentialism as a philosophical juncture connecting modernity and postmodernity in that it both reflects the postmodern issue of the multiplicity of ground (rejecting a universal sense of ground) and yet depends upon the modern solution of the communicative agent. In all deference to Albert Camus, who stated that he was not an existentialist, the metaphor of "stranger" assumes a sense of detachment central to modernity that is unresponsive to the postmodern agent embedded within a multiplicity of possibilities of ground. Postmodern scholarship does not reject agency, but situates and embeds it in what Martin Buber called the mud of everyday life; one cannot stand above history. The ultimate element is what agency is embedded in—it is embedded in multiplicity of ground or what François Lyotard would call "petits récits" or "little narratives." That multiplicity of ground makes all the difference. So in communicating, we seek to understand "What is the story or ground that guides self, other, and historical moment?" without falling prey to psychologism that ascribes motives to another person. The danger of psychologism is that it embraces three modern fictions: first, the autonomous self; second, the ability to stand above history

and figure out the motives of another; and third, narrative amnesia about the power and bias of the ground or narrative that shapes communicative life.

*Can you explain the difference or similarities between “ground” and “narrative”?*

I use the term “narrative” because it comes from ethics scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas. The term also guides Robert Bellah, who is indebted to MacIntyre. The notion of “ground” connects to Martin Buber and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Buber reminded us that life is akin to walking in the mud, not in pristine clarity. Think about mud up to your ankles, to your knees, to your hips, to your shoulders, to the tips of your earlobes—that is the ground of everyday life of an embedded communicative agent. I have talked so long about the issue of “narrative” that I worry at times that it becomes a kind of floating cloud-like framework. With the issue of ground, literally your feet are in the ground; as an embedded agent you are saying, “I can’t stand above anything. I am so confused; I do not know what to do. But I’m still going to act.” The notion of ground is more concrete for me. As Buber stated, the ground is the mud of everyday life. Sometimes we have mud up to our eyebrows. I have not worked out all the connections between narrative and ground, but I am partial to the image and texture of mud! As Bonhoeffer said, the most immoral thing to do to another is to destroy the ground of another person.

Ground is not individual turf; from an existential phenomenological standpoint, I can stand on ground and attend to the ground of another, allowing persons to be co-informed by ground that emerges “between” persons. The ground is not fragile and is, ironically, capable of becoming invisible as one focuses too much upon its existence. Phenomenology presupposes that ground evaporates upon too much concentrated reflection. It is like lecturing in the classroom when all is going well, only to be disrupted by the reflection: “Yes! I am good today!” Something happens, and that moment of undue reflection makes it impossible to reclaim the moment.

Phenomenologically, ground is not fragile; it is, however, temporal and tempted to seek cover in moments of undue light. To turn a phrase, ground seeks cover when too much artificial light focuses attention. Such is the reason I stress that we can only glimpse the face of the Other. In the Old Testament, we never see the face of God, only a glimpse. Dialogically, we never see or grasp the face of the Other. As I remind nontraditional students

who are in my class, “It does not matter why you are here. It does not matter if your Mom on her deathbed said, ‘Please get an education.’ It does not matter if somehow you are here because you love knowledge. It does not matter if you are here because the bus dropped you off with nowhere else to go. I do not care why you are here—it not my business. The only thing I have a right to ask is that we seek to learn together.” “Come and learn, no matter what the reason” rests within the insight of Dietrich Bonhoeffer—do not unmask another. Such a move invites the danger of expecting another to engage a task with the same motives as my own. Life simply needs to be bigger than such provincial impulses of attribution.

It’s not my right to unmask the ground of another. The Old Testament reminds us of the importance of a glimpse of the face of God and no more. The face of God, I think, for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a human face situated on real ground. The glimpses of the human face come as a derivative of learning the ground of another; we are a people situated and embedded in ground, the mud of everyday life.

I remember being in a different administrative position in which a student came in and was in tears. He was in a class with a theology professor who kept ridiculing and making fun of this person’s very conservative “me and Jesus” theology. I met with the professor over coffee. I said, “It seems important that you tell each student everything you can about contemporary scholarship. But why do you ridicule the student’s personal faith?” This professor said, “I need to rid this student of these really unsophisticated ideas.” I said, “You know, you are not in print about your ‘sophisticated ideas.’ You have not published a book; is it possible that your ideas have not stood the test of peer review? Yet, with untested ideas, you seek to destroy another’s faith life. Why don’t you work from an additive framework and begin a class with, ‘Where you stand on a personal level in your faith is your decision. Now I am going to tell you everything that I know from my bias of my scholarship, my ground. Some of my ideas are true and some will not stand the test of time.’” Such is the reason that Dietrich Bonhoeffer worked as a scholar in the day and hit his knees in common prayer at night. A glimpse, not a grasp, guides communication ethics that protects the ground of another.

I now have been a scholar long enough that I am in print critiquing what I wrote at an earlier stage in my work. It is not only ethical, but also prudent to be careful about destroying another’s ground. One may find, as all have in a long life, moments of regret, even academics, about what is or is not in



print. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, while writing a novel in prison, stated it is immoral to destroy someone's ground. I think the primary thing that we need to do is to say as teachers, as educators, that my task is not to destroy someone's ground but to question with my own admitted limitations. That is why I made the move to a constructive hermeneutic that seeks implications; such a position is not naïve but is reluctant to assume the modern premise that I can stand above history and proclaim truth for the misinformed. I am not opposed to a deconstructive hermeneutic when engaged with Søren Kierkegaard's call of "fear and trembling." It is bravado and undue confidence, however, that makes me tremble in my soul.

*What are your thoughts about communication ethics and the historical shift to postmodernity?*

The term "postmodernity" explicitly announces the rejection of modernity as a failed experiment. In a traditional culture there is a universal agreement; the practices are embedded in life together. In modernity, there is an expectation that one can assume the universals of progress, efficiency, and the autonomous agent.

As I talk to students about the move from modernity to postmodernity, I ask questions such as, "How many of your parents expected to keep their jobs forever and how many have not?" "How many parents and friends do you know who are divorced?" Our daily encounter with fragmentation reveals the world of "Leave it to Beaver" as now pragmatically untrue for many. Such a world personifies, in the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, "bad faith." Postmodernity acknowledges the fib of modernity. Interestingly, postmodernity is more akin to traditional life than to modernity. I encourage students interested in postmodern issues to study medieval life, not modern life. Medieval life gives us a greater insight into a postmodern world; both deal with narrative contention and struggle, with the difference being that the conversation no longer revolves around the Church. Postmodernity opens narrative dispute to all walks of life. This postmodern moment is a juncture, a pause, a rhetorical interruption. The assumptions of universal agreement are gone and the temporal assumptions in the stage after postmodernity not yet in place. In short, postmodernity is not forever, but it is a glorious moment of learning; it is a call to learn and to give up leaning on universal assumptions. This is a learning moment, not a teaching moment, in human history.

Postmodernity is a moment that makes discussion of religion possible; all ideas have a place at the table of conversation and dispute. Such is the reason Jürgen Habermas reminds us of the importance of religion in this historical moment. We live in a time of shaken foundations, a rhetorical interruption that reminds us that we do not know all. Learning is the demand of this historical moment.

Scholarship is now moving beyond the celebration of postmodernity to figuring out what might be temporal universals that will guide us in a time of recognized difference. Cliff Christians and Michael Traber are insightful on this count. The demand for learning, however, is the ethical first principle of this historical moment. I am studying French, and if my fluency ever reaches beyond a modest level, I will turn to another language. The key is not what we know, but a commitment to what a colleague called “non-stop learning.” In an era of recognized difference, it is unethical to stop learning—it is inadequate to say, “Gee, I know something about Judaism and I’m a Christian.” Religious complexity is great within the worlds of both Judaism and Christianity, and now no one can exclude an Islamic faith perspective from the conversation. No matter what we know, it is simply not adequate or enough.

Learning as an ethical first principle requires us to figure out, “What are the differing places or ground upon which people stand?” I am an educator. I am not a politician. My first task is to learn and to be careful about premature solutions to the complexity of the world before us. My deepest hope is that we may learn about one another and enjoy the incredible texture of difference. Emmanuel Levinas is right in beginning with the face of the Other that reminds us that I am my brother’s keeper. At this moment, the “keeper” is the person of “non-stop learning.”

Postmodernity has a lot of energy left, even as we move in differing directions. Postmodernity is first a questioning of modernist bravado and then a call to conversation and learning. We must fight the impulse of fear of the demand for constant learning accompanied by a retreat back to the comfort of modernity and its universal assurances. I have priests and friends in religious life that I encourage to embrace this moment. Modernity took much off the table, including religious conversation. Postmodernity is the era of welcome—a welcome to learning and difference. We cannot fall prey to the temptation to return to modern familiar assumptions of progress, efficiency, and the autonomous agent. Postmodernity opens the conversation by offering

an invitation to enter the conversation. If one is to engage communication ethics in this era, the first principle is learning.

*How does the work of philosophers, social theorists, and theologians inform communication ethics?*

My engagement with communication ethics begins with the assumption that all discourse rests within what Jürgen Habermas calls “interests.” There is no neutral view of communication—philosophers, social theorists, and theologians point us to presuppositions, interests that contain a given view of the “good” that is protected and promoted. Communication ethics requires informative investigation; I turn to such scholarly venues for insight. In modernity, the primary question is implementation; there is paradigmatic agreement. I assume that paradigms are in conflict and require analysis of differences.

I was asked by an assistant superintendent in the Pittsburgh area to assist with communication problems among parents, students, and teachers. I asked him to ask the parents, students, and teachers to define basic communication concepts such as empathy and acts of active listening. The next phone call revealed the following: “Sure, they know how to define these terms and many more related to communication.” I then said, “Then the issue isn’t one of knowledge and implementation. The issue is situated in the question of ‘why’—‘Why’ work with and care for another human being?” The fundamental communication ethics question for me is no longer “How do we help people to resolve conflict?” The fundamental communication ethics question is “Why one should care about and desire to work with another human being and learn from difference?” The fulcrum points of discourse in communication ethics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century are more closely linked to background questions of “why” learn than to foreground questions of paradigmatic implementation of “how” to fix.

I find it interesting to go back to Mahatma Gandhi and his engagement with Kantian philosophy—the ends are the means in the making. Essentially, foreground implementation happens to be the end of the means that were in the making; the background shapes the foreground. The foreground is, in a sense, the end, but the means in the making is the background in which we live, situated in what makes all the difference. Keeping “means” as primary privileges learning over knowledge. The example I share with students is that sometimes when a person meets another and the two people become incredi-

bly good friends very quickly, only later to become archenemies, one asks, why? Friendship based upon implementation agreement is different from friendship based upon learning about changing means and paradigmatic changes. As the world of implementation changes, we connect through learning, through questions of “means” that engage and shape the world of tomorrow. Communication ethics rests in learning more than in telling and implementation.

*How would you characterize the integration of dialogue and communication ethics in your work?*

Initially Mahatma Gandhi propelled me with a pragmatic understanding of “truth.” When Gandhi was asked, “How do you find truth?” his comment was, “You follow a path, and you have the courage to follow that path. You also have an appreciation that others follow different paths. If at some point you find that you stumble and fall, you are thankful that others have followed a path other than your own. If you find out that another path is better than yours, you need to have the courage to change your direction.” I began to work with ethics with this pragmatic Gandhian framework, which foreshadows a postmodern pragmatism.

The dialogic component in my work embraced a continental understanding of dialogue based upon ground and narrative, contrasted with an American understanding of dialogue situated in conversation between autonomous communicative agents. The substantial reason I connected dialogue to Martin Buber and Hans-Georg Gadamer and not to Carl Rogers rests in the emphasis on ground or narrative as *a priori*—dialogue begins before people in conversation meet; we carry a ground-laden, a story-laden, bias into the discourse. With a Rogerian or an American understanding of dialogue, we presuppose the dialogue begins when the conversation begins. That kind of American dialogue presupposes, in a sense, narrative agreement. It presupposes that interlocutors have similar ground. The primary difference for Buber is that the ground makes a difference. Ground is the bias, or what Gadamer would call the fundamental prejudice, with which one enters the interpretive act of dialogue.

As time evolved, I understood the importance of ground more and more thoroughly. Without an understanding of ground, an American understanding of dialogue presupposes that universal understanding will emerge out of the discourse. If, indeed, we work from that kind of position, we will never

resolve the problems in the Middle East, nor issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and affectivity. The American view of dialogue is philosophically malnourished. If you look at Martin Buber and his dialogic work that came out of World War II, after there were eight to ten million people killed in concentration camps, and one acknowledges the extreme anguish and pain and human suffering, it is clear that narrative agreement is a modern fiction.

The notion of ground or narrative differences moves communication ethics to a non-humanistic position. The issue is not that I am in dialogue with you; I am in dialogue with the ground upon which you stand—which is the issue of embedded agents in discourse. The power of this dialogic understanding of communication ethics announced itself in Martin Buber's meeting with a student at Union Theological Seminary. A Protestant seminarian asks Buber, "What is it like to be a Jew?" Buber's eyes began to glare with incredible intensity as he looked at the man and asked, "Do you really want to know?" The student then said, "No." This was a dialogic act in which Buber was saying, "Do you want to meet this ground, this narrative land of the Jew?" That exchange was not the kind of dialogue we talk about in the United States. Buber was not Mr. Rogers; he was not Carl Rogers. The intensity of Buber's view of dialogue moved us from a therapeutic moral *cul de sac* situated in feeling to the pragmatic necessity of learning, narrative ground, and a conversation well underway before the discourse begins. Communication ethics and dialogue connect as one embraces the necessity of encountering and learning from differing narrative ground without falling prey to relativism. As Buber revealed, such a view of dialogue has a position that nourishes a given sense of the "good" that frames a given communication ethic.

*If someone asked you to identify significant areas for future communication ethics research, what would you tell that person?*

I would have to give two answers. One is that I would say, "Follow your questions. Study what does not make sense and forces you to learn." It is like writing a dissertation. You need to study what you don't understand. The key is to move from telling to learning. Someone was asking, "Why do you write?" I said, "I am propelled by ignorance." The more questions I have, the more I engage ideas and write to learn. As a scholar of the humanities, I can

meet confusion and discover temporal clarity that takes me to additional questions.

If I were to give another answer, I would point to a love of ethnographic learning, discovering the difference that others offer, whether framed as encountering and learning from differing ground, narrative structures, or standpoints. All the terms point to learning as an encounter with difference. Such a view of learning is akin to the academic subject matter of “comparative religion.” Communication ethics is learning of and about differing ground with comparative awareness that rests in comparative goodwill and as dialogic a first step, keeping evaluative dismissal of another’s ground as a reluctant act, rather than the communicative gesture of routine.

In a postmodern age of narrative and virtue contention, communication ethics is academically and in everyday life first and foremost an act of learning about the ground, narrative, and standpoint that guides oneself, the Other, and the historical moment. Each position or ground protects and carries a sense of the “good.” Using the insight of Calvin Schrag and communicative praxis, I would frame the following horizon for communication ethics. Communication ethics is learning *about* difference from ground, narrative, and standpoint. Communication ethics is *by* an embedded communicative agent situated in the historical moment, the mud of everyday life. Communication ethics from a non-humanistic framework is *for* a given sense of the “good” that calls one to act in a given direction, regardless of liking or emotive response to another. I love Emmanuel Levinas’s reminder to care for another without regard for the color of another’s eyes. Communication ethics lives within the mandate to learn, unabated by our own sense of whim and propelled by a power more substantial than liking—a phenomenological ground that calls us as a “responsive ‘I’” to act as “my brother’s keeper” not as a teller, but as a learner.

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