

## A Conversation about Communication Ethics with Sharon L. Bracci

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

My initial interest in communication ethics emerged out of my rhetorical studies, especially Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and his theory of *phronesis*, a kind of practical wisdom honed through experience. The classical version of language, language as an instrument of persuasion, was both exciting and frightening. "How far can I go in trying to persuade someone? Is it even right to try to do so?" I suppose we could say that the power of the word is what led me to try to find some legitimate constraints on my enthusiasm to convince any hapless soul who has the misfortune to appear before me. I really loved to argue. Then, "How does one argue ethically? How does one argue in good faith?" These seemed the more interesting questions.

A second prompt was practical and pedagogical. At Ohio State I supervised the basic course in argumentation under Josina Makau's direction. Frankly, if I was fretful about the ethical use of argument for myself, I felt even greater pressure to do right by the hundreds of students that took these courses. Over time, dovetailing effective and ethical use of communication in the classroom just became a natural combination that has never left me.

I think that the third prompt was this growing interest in bioethical discourse. I see it as an exemplar of public moral reasoning over value-laden issues. I committed myself to understanding the rhetorical and ethical dimensions in this discourse. I pursued it in my scholarship, of course, in Communication Studies, and then made a more formal commitment to it by taking a second master's degree in bioethics at Case Western when I left Ohio State.

What drew me to bioethics from a communication ethics perspective was a need in bioethical discourse to talk across disciplines. What norms are going to guide philosophers, physicians, legal scholars, religious ethicists, social scientists, and communication scholars to hear one another out?

It's been instructive to study how this discourse engages the postmodern critique. If there is ever an ethics with a view toward contingent action, medicine is it. In the research lab and at the bedside, one simply can't avoid evaluating issues and courses of action in which the stakes are sometimes enormously high. I think my initial interest in communication ethics parallels the bioethics angst. I am trying to learn to "speak postmodern" in healthcare contexts, as David Morris joked in an insightful article in a recent *Hasting*

*Center Report.* In sum, I think rhetoric, argumentation, and bioethics would be my three impulses.

*How do you define communication ethics?*

This is a difficult question because any definition I give you is going to reveal a set of assumptions and biases, points of emphasis. Having conceded that, the short answer that comes to mind is that communication ethics is moral argumentation. That's basically how I've approached it. On the other hand, I think we could probably tease it out more. Let's call communication ethics an inquiry into the range of other-regarding communication patterns that engage difference and, at the same time, uncover a common humanity—human commonalities—in ways that contribute to our willingness to live peaceably among one another. There is a lot more to say, of course, in terms of understanding, evaluation, judgment in interpersonal and public contexts, but I think if we focus on key notions of other-regardedness—difference within commonality—then we can capture an interest in ethics as both social and as action-oriented. Then those actions can arise out of this common ground we discover together, through language.

I prefer the term “communication ethics” rather than “communication ethic.” Communication ethics seems to capture a plurality of theories, principles, norms, and language patterns we invoke to justify our behavior. This plurality, in turn, reflects the plural methods and goals of communication itself. So, communication ethics examines better and worse reasoning with a view toward action. Communication ethics is a mode of moral argumentation, from my perspective.

*Do you understand philosophical ethics as distinct from communication ethics?*

I used to think of communication ethics as a kind of a subset of moral philosophy. I don't think quite that way anymore. I think that communication ethics differs in scope and focus. Moral philosophy is a broader category. It is a systematic inquiry into the nature of the good life: “How do I know it?” “How do I live it?” “Where are the intellectual resources to help me justify my version of it?” There are some broad metaphysical and epistemological issues embedded in moral philosophy because they relate to claims about human nature and truth claims.

Communication ethics, on the other hand, is a more focused inquiry into what it means to be an ethical dialogical self in terms of the communicative process itself and the dialogical virtues required to participate well in that process. We ask “Who can speak?” and then, “How are specific patterns going to do a better or worse job of building understanding and, importantly, developing the will to engage difference, not only respectfully, but critically?” So, the questions focus on access, the quality of the language once that access is gained, and the dialogical virtues required to sustain engagement throughout deliberation.

Having said that, communication ethics has historically sought to defend a view of ethical communication by looking to moral philosophy for intellectual support. We pretty much tied our fortunes to moral philosophy and so we now face the same crisis in credibility that philosophers face. As philosophical assumptions are challenged, so are ours. We need to think about how to answer the critiques of classical theory and look to our own field for some theoretical support. My own view is to take my support where I can find it. I believe there is much in both philosophy and communication theory to help us address serious challenges to the ability to do ethics.

*How is communication ethics similar to or different from rhetorical ethics?*

Historically, rhetorical ethics has been concerned with legitimate constraints on efforts to persuade or convince an audience: “What are the ethical limits of what I can say in my efforts to win others over to my view?” “What are the limits of my willingness to adapt to audiences?” “How much do I want to manipulate their beliefs, their values, their sensibilities, their fears, to pursue what I think is a common end for both of us?” The common perception that rhetors adapt and manipulate shamelessly for their own purposes is, of course, what gives rhetoric its bad name among some philosophers and the public today.

But I don’t want to make too much of the difference between rhetorical and communication ethics—there are too many overlapping issues with respect to the nature of selves, the grounds for truth claims, the possibility of moral autonomy, the ideal of checked power. The lines are blurred, so perhaps it is a question of emphasis rather than substance.

*How would you characterize the integration of dialogic ethics and moral argument in your work?*

My research situates communication ethics in the broad category of public moral argument and democratic deliberation. My work is much more in public case studies than in small group or dyad patterns. So, my focus is on public deliberation with a view toward action.

If you want to tie it back to moral philosophy, there are some basic themes here. Obviously, an inquiry into what it means to deliberate well. This is a broad category of current interest across disciplines, including political philosophy, political science, and sociology. Each looks at what it means to engage in effective and ethical deliberation, what justifies policy-making. These intersect traditional communication concerns about “Who has access to deliberative space?” Once concepts of power, liberation, and empowerment are engaged, questions about the limits of moral autonomy and agency remain. Finally, students of public deliberation wrestle with the problem of potentially incommensurable ends. Arguably, this constellation of concerns never came up in quite the same way, historically.

A second theme that really is interesting is the interplay, if you will, between cognitive and emotional appeals in deliberation: “What is the role of emotion in public moral argument?” “What are some guidelines for evaluating the appropriate argumentative force of some specific emotions?” “What is the cognitive force of something like righteous anger? moral outrage? compassion? guilt? fear?”

Another theme centers on media. In the United States, let’s face it, most of us live with the proliferation of mediated images and texts. Young people, especially, are exposed to a stunning amount every day. I think questions in ethics arise here: “Does this proliferation of exposure help shape our moral sensibilities, particularly of children in their formative phase?” “Do media influences mean that we need to take formal account of them when we theorize and practice communication ethics?” Maybe what I’m asking is “Do theories of moral education, now, need to build in an account of mediated moral sensibilities?” I think this is a very interesting question.

A final theme relates to what we might call the moral burden of knowledge. I think most of us would concede that once we know something with some potentially powerful ethical implications in a context, we’re obliged to take account of it. We can’t “un-know” it or wish it away. This knowledge is going to become the eventual springs of action for some of us. So, the

question arises: “What are the limits of our moral burden to find out, to turn knowledge into an understanding that can lead to wisdom and action?” These days are ethically challenging for the uninformed, the unreflective, the unknowing in an information-rich culture such as the United States: “Are we just merely naïve?” “Do we practice a kind of willful ignorance?” “Given all of our resources, do information-rich societies have an increased moral burden to know?” Perhaps ignorance is no longer a morally neutral standpoint. With respect to issues that guide my scholarship, I would say those are the main themes.

*If a person has information, that implies an obligation.*

Right. Cases of distant suffering are the ones that come up all the time in media. Zygmunt Bauman talked about this in *Postmodern Ethics* and *Life in Fragments*. In the past, communication traveled so slowly; many were ignorant of distant horrors. We don’t have that excuse anymore. We *know*. On some level, even glancing at a headline, we know something. How we react to headlines says something about moral sensibilities. “What do we say about the compassionate and altruistic aspects of human nature that are getting rattled in an information-rich environment?” I’m dancing around the debate over compassion fatigue here. We see, we hear, horrors of distant suffering. We freeze in a kind of impotence; we don’t know quite what to do and often we do nothing. The thesis of compassion fatigue assumes that at one time readers and viewers of distant suffering did not disengage, but now the constant onslaught of images overwhelms us, jades us, and we turn the page.

I just finished reading Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others*. She’s written a marvelous monograph in which she conducts a wide sweep of visual depictions of war, terror, et cetera. She concludes that there is an unbridgeable difference between being there and getting the mediated image. The mediated image will never have the same impact and that’s why there is such a disconnect with the photojournalist who is trying hard to get us to see what he or she sees. Yet, viewers can’t, the distance is too great. It doesn’t mean we can’t act and be compassionate, but there is a basic disconnect in the experience of horror and the mediated visual representation of it. Her book is a provocative contribution to discussions over the role of art to stimulate the moral imagination and strengthen our compassionate sensibilities.

*In addressing themes in your scholarship, you've mentioned several writers. Are there others who have influenced your work in communication ethics?*

Definitely. Early on as I was trained in rhetorical theory and criticism, Aristotle and to a lesser degree Cicero, were strong influences. I was very much interested to understand prudential reasoning, *phronesis* as a kind of experiential wisdom that was “close to the ground,” as they say, always attending to the contextual constraints in decision making. This is very useful, of course in bioethics. Stephen Toulmin was very influential to me as I began to read the bioethical literature. I read his challenge to universalist reasoning in *Cosmopolis* and in his work on bioethics with Al Jonsen in *The Abuse of Casuistry*. These were marvelous defenses of particularistic reasoning that was very refreshing to see take hold in bioethical decision-making.

Also, early on, the philosopher Isaiah Berlin, in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, influenced me. He offered a lucid and eloquent defense of pluralism. He was absolutely poetic, I think, in castigating the evils of monistic schemes and universalism gone awry. Berlin also wrote an insightful essay on Machiavelli that was a turning point in my thinking about prudential reasoning and pluralism. Then, of course, in our own field, scholars in communication ethics have challenged me to extend my thinking in ways that more seriously engage the postmodern critique of several classical thinkers.

Outside of the field, scholars who study the discursive or communicative turn in public deliberation are many. Most begin from Jürgen Habermas's challenge, especially to Aristotelian reasoning in the public sphere. Partly in response to Habermas, there is a wide literature in deliberative democracy that is trying to theorize dialogical interactivity as a kind of democratic rationality. John Dryzek's early text on this is actually called *Discursive Democracy*. There are lots of people working on this: Dryzek, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, among others.

Of course, Seyla Benhabib is the most enduring for me. She reworks Jürgen Habermas in a way that answers a lot of serious challenges to discourse theory. She puts these challenges in conversation with feminists, postmodernists, communitarians, and theorizes her version of interactive universalism. In doing so, she manages to make plausible what seems impossible. She defends a dialogical process that attends to particulars and contexts and gender differences and the formation of identity in narrative. At

the same time, she rethinks the normative constraints of conversation and defends principles that transcend context to develop ways to reason, post-conventionally, beyond kin and culture. In this scheme, all norms are negotiable once deliberation is underway. I think a key insight of interactive universalism is its potential formative power. There's a modest but real hope that participants can develop this kind of enlarged thinking that eventually takes more people into their circle of concern.

*You've mentioned the contributions of scholars from Aristotle and Cicero to Jürgen Habermas and Seyla Benhabib. What differences emerge in communication ethics across different historical periods?*

If we want to approach communication ethics in a traditional mode, we're going to proceed from a very different set of assumptions about the nature of human selves, our place in the cosmos, the nature of rationality and emotions, the capacity for moral autonomy, and certainly gender relations. Having said that, I don't really think that Greek, Roman, and Stoic styles are interchangeable. Let's just mention a few commonalities and differences and leave it at that.

With respect to human nature, I think Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic ethics share a pretty high regard for humans as rational—well, men anyway. The cultivation of our rational capacity is the surest way to self-control. This is important for the kind of self-mastery that Charles Taylor talks about in *Sources of the Self*. In any event, our self-control is going to be in sync with broader harmonies. The self desires an orderly harmonious life that reflects the larger cosmic order. Emotions don't work very well here because they are perceived as chaotic. They are certainly not trustworthy. Our desires can lead us astray into disorder, chaos; worse, for the Stoics, emotional desires lead to perpetual dissatisfaction. We can't ever really satisfy our emotional wants. So some level of detachment is called for, and I think that's why the life of contemplation is so highly valued in this tradition.

If I want to engage communication ethics in the Platonic mode, I'm going to focus on objective detachment. I'm on this monistic mission to find the Good and the True. But, I'm also going to value some kind of Socratic dialogue in which assumptions are rigorously examined, all the time. Plato is just not going to let me get away with some self-satisfying complacent life, and call myself ethically engaged. That's a marvelous legacy, I believe. Aristotle obviously valued rationality, the contemplative life, but I think he

made a bigger space for emotions in ethical deliberation. You couldn't call him an emotivist, as we understand that term today. Certainly Aristotelian ethics is about much more than preferences, but I think we can see it's rigorously focused on proportionality. Doing the right thing at the right time and doing it in accord with this virtuous balance is the goal (and the way to happiness), which is why Aristotle's doctrine of the Mean is so important.

I think that both Aristotle and Plato would agree that character formation, a kind of habituation of virtue, is important and it happens early. If I want to engage communication ethics in an Aristotelian mode, I'm going to be much more focused on those communication patterns that habituate the dialogical virtues I want to champion. *Phronesis* keeps me in a position where I need to respect other opinions. I need to have this reciprocal engagement and I have to have some hope that the process is formative, wherever we go. If nothing else, Aristotelian ethics is practice, always attending, always close to particulars.

Let me just leave it with one example. I'm going to see good in the world, perhaps small pockets of peacemaking in a violent environment, but will reject the Platonic model of contemplating an ideal of peace. Let's say if Aristotle were around right now, I think he'd nudge us to study virtuous behavior in the midst of vice, people who choose not to participate in wrongdoing. I think he'd want us to pay particular attention to whistleblowers, for example. That would be my varied approach, in a classical mode.

The modernist mode is going to continue rational pursuits with a vengeance, striving toward rational control of the problem before me. René Descartes and Immanuel Kant make this pretty explicit. If I'm in the modernist mode, I place great faith in the power of reason to solve all problems, not just ethical problems, but also social and political problems. If I'm doing ethics in the modernist mode, I am relatively isolated in this task. Importantly, let's not forget what emerges now is a concept of inherent human dignity that's very important. I don't think that's left us. Modernist ethics necessarily counts on the sameness of humans in its deliberations, whether it is in considering if I would be willing to universalize the norms of my actions for everyone, or in considering how everyone counts for one and no more when I consider the consequences of some speech in action. In the end it's individualistic. It's rational. It's disembodied. I'll be attempting objectivity, but I'm also going to be focused on sameness. We may talk a lot about justice claims and what rights and obligations are going to flow from those claims.



The postmodern challenge is pretty much turning all of this on its head. So if I'm going to engage it in the postmodern tradition, I'm really taking a very different approach in terms of my ability to exercise rational control over anything. I'm going to give up the notion of consensus on what counts as a binding mode of reasoning or even on ends. I'm going to be very concerned about epistemological claims: "What constitutes truth?" "What methods are legitimate ways of knowing it?" I'm going to be very focused on power, and power for people to distort communication, because they're also controlling access. I'm going to be much more focused on the mediated nature of human experience. Prior to this period the assumption was that humans can know from experience and can learn from experience. The postmodernists want to remind us that our experience is itself a set of mediated values and cultural beliefs that shape us. So, teaching in this mode will assume more awareness of the cultural horizon from which we deliberate. This is very difficult. It's impossible to escape these confrontations in our reasoning since we can't move out of where we are.

As a consequence, communication ethicists have some options in their approach. I'll mention just three. First, communication ethicists can reject some or all of these contemporary challenges and work to rehabilitate classical or universalist theories in *toto*, as they were originally thought, on the view that they have not been seriously discredited to the point of moral irrelevance. Second, communication ethicists can accept these challenges to rationality, autonomy, consensus making, and so forth, and respond by shifting the grounds of their efforts. This would involve a move away from grounding communication ethics in discredited theories and justifying it instead in the virtues of the communicative process itself. This approach would also form common cause with postmodern concerns and regard communication ethics as an engagement with issues related to gender, empowerment, decentered selves, multiple narratives, and ethical pluralism. A third way would try to engage the various challenges of postmodernism with respect to rationality, consensus, the nature of selves, et cetera, by asking if existing ethical theories can be fitted or refitted to meet some of the demands of contemporary ethical life. In my own thinking, this third way has merit. Let me say, however, that I am mindful of Susan Moller Okin's insight in *Justice, Gender and the Family* that we cannot just add women and stir—for example, to classical theory—because a whole edifice, a way of life is predicated on the patriarchal assumptions of some theories.

*What is the biggest challenge for communication ethics in a time of postmodernity?*

Well, I think we've been talking around this a little bit. The greatest challenge of course to any universalist claim today is going to be in the realm of the epistemological or the metaphysical: "How much knowledge do we have?" "What rendering of human selves makes knowledge possible?" From the postmodernist view, any prior understanding of human nature and autonomy is not only misguided, it is repressive. Human subjects are not similarly focused on self-mastery. We do not all share a desire to hold domination over nature. We do not all embrace an instrumental rationality that is so technologically focused that any experiential wisdom is lost. The postmodern is going to challenge reason and discourse that's purely instrumental. Sometimes discourse just wants to celebrate a playful enjoyment of otherness. The critique is that modernism and classicism destroy any hope of doing that, destroy any kind of discourse that permits the non-instrumental use of otherness. This is a harsh critique, and I'm not sure that it's entirely warranted. Even so, I think we need to listen to it.

Joseph Dunne noted that his project in *Back to the Rough Ground* was to approach Aristotelian *phronesis* carefully, to show that it is a complex, subtle process. Before we trash it, let's understand it, he cautioned, and maybe the same could be said in present circumstances. The task for us I think is to approach discourse and dialogue among radically situated and contextualized selves, selves who are not fully autonomous and individualistic with subtlety and a view toward understanding the ways identity is both formed and reformed in language. We might not have to jettison the past entirely to grapple with the ethical implications of identity formation. I think the problem for us is that communication ethics, like ethics in general, has to assume some level of accountability and has to assume some level of autonomy and even intentionality. After all, "ought" implies "can." We cannot speculate about ethical dialogical selves outside some understanding of what human selves can do.

We need to address this challenge and preserve some varying degrees of accountability, motivation, intentionality, and ability to grow. I think that's the key idea: growing moral autonomy. This involves developing an ethical mind of one's own. One doesn't say "Well, we do it this way because we've always done it this way." Or, "Well, that's how we do things in the United States." Or, "My grandparents voted that way, of course I'm voting that

way.” One must think through the reasons for speaking in a particular way and assume responsibility for it. Ethics can still be interested in how humans can develop ethical minds of their own beyond conventions or traditions even as we take account of the constraints of those conventions and constraints.

We are contingently formed in narrative—some of which we’re not the author of, but some of which we can be. Every person who’s decided to reinvent herself knows what that’s all about. Sociological evidence supports Seyla Benhabib’s view that individuals weave an identity of themselves out of conflicting narratives over time. Accountability and a fragile autonomy also emerge in this process. So, “If there is evidence that humans can do this, can we then join the minimalist perspective on universals?” I think we can as long as we emphasize “minimalist.” Not so minimalist that all discourse uncovers is a range of empty platitudes and commonplaces that are so general they’re meaningless. Conversely, if we’re going to put too many normative constraints into the process, well then we’ve lost most of our ethical credibility. Here again is how Benhabib’s interactive universalism is a valuable contribution. She’s trying to stay in the Kantian tradition of universalizing something that speaks to the common ground of human dignity. She’s very focused on trying to get people to engage in kind of an enlarged thinking. Benhabib’s project isn’t really to critique universalism as being wrong-headed. Neither is she challenging the contingent and contextual nature of moral reasoning. She’s just trying to theorize a conversational model that accepts the critique but sets in place formative conversational norms that help us develop this capacity for enlarged thinking that’s both culturally embedded and culturally transcendent. It’s a huge task.

Seyla Benhabib recently talked about the so-called “scarf affair” in France. A Muslim girl was told not to wear her scarf in school because doing so made an explicit religious statement. This was a situation in which we had a lot of institutional debate going on. We had a lot of religious speakers come in and say, “We’re preserving this and that.” What we never engaged were the opinions of the girls themselves. They were never part of the conversation. Later, in private conversation, girls noted that they were wearing the scarves after conversation with their Jewish and Christian friends who were wearing modest displays of their religious symbols. Scarf wearers were reframing their actions as a political statement, or a statement of individualism. They were not wearing scarves as a mode of oppression or strict party line in terms of religious sensibility. They were re-signing it, making the

semiotic move. A girl could now assert that she was making a change in what it means to her and asserting that meaning and, in the process, re-identifying herself. A process that's formative allows all that to come out; allows other girls to hear that; respects and allows people to reverse their perspective and think beyond the traditional norm. So you'd start with these basic normative constraints, namely universal moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity, by allowing anybody who can speak to the affair and has a stake in the outcomes to join the conversation. All can question. All can challenge the norms and points of relevance as they relate to the topic of religious symbols.

This is tentative work, but Martha Nussbaum and some others have done really interesting work on theorizing what she calls the "human capabilities approach." She's not the only one working here, but this is another movement in universalism that I think holds promise. As a classicist, Nussbaum is an insightful interpreter of Aristotle's work. What she and others are theorizing now is a normative theory of human flourishing. On some level it is, unapologetically essentialist, to the degree that the theory posits components of what it takes for any human to flourish. Now we can debate the range of this or that component, but if we begin from some set of basic human capabilities we have a workable framework for universal human rights. Obviously, that dialogue's already going on in the United Nations and other places, but she's bringing some philosophical weight to it that I find extremely promising. It's tentative, but it's a real start. Nussbaum practices an admirable kind of engaged philosophy. She's done some terrific work in the emotions, in the upheavals of thought, and intelligence of emotions in an edited volume with Jonathan Glover called *Women, Culture, and Development*. She's no armchair philosopher. She travels the world. She participates in international forums, and she's increasingly aware that the push for human rights is very vibrant today. So, why not theorize some grounds for those rights in the nature of selves, or at least try?

*What are some of the elements that would inhibit or enhance the possibility of a globalizing vision of ethical discourse?*

Oh, lots of things! The inhibiting forces are some of the tensions we've been talking about—philosophical risks and theoretical hurdles that have to be addressed. My bias is that we have to circumscribe our definition of universalism. Otherwise, cross-cultural conversations feed the perception that

Westerners are only and always ready to run up the flag of cultural imperialism. It is too easy to see strong claims as disingenuous attempts to impose one's cultural bias on another.

Another force these days includes the various identity movements—gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual identity. There's such a plurality of goals within these movements and there is a legitimate call for recognition. So, identity politics will clash pretty fiercely with some other cultural goals and make common goals of ethical discourse very difficult. Sometimes there's a perception that there's not enough shared ground to begin the conversation. At other times, I might be so passionately focused on my legitimate goals, I'm just not going to have the energy or the will to engage serious difference in a deliberative forum. Identity politics right now is a serious barrier to any universalizing vision.

I think an enabling possibility is one that lets us look at cultures as much more contested. They're narrative sites of identity, yes, but they're also narrative sites of reforming that identity. If the problem is the huge tension between post-Soviet and post-colonial cultures trying to find their own identity, and alternatively this globalization push, if you will, then maybe we need to take a closer look at what cultures are like. Here again, I think Seyla Benhabib can help us. In her recent book, *The Claims of Culture*, she shifts her lens of focus from gender, as she did in some of the work we talked about before, to a complex view of culture. Let's go back to the scarf affair. When I look into a culture, I might mistakenly see an essentialism that isn't there. If I'm inside, I know that participants are looking at their shared stories, but they're contesting their stories as well.

We have an enabling possibility if we reject the view of cultures as homogenous, as holistic. This rejection helps us to engage specific claims for truth and validity in specific contexts. If we restrict our universalism to an accommodation of this plurality and the contested nature of cultures, I think we have a better chance to have a good dialogue. Benhabib calls this a dual-track of democratic deliberation, because it permits the widest amount of contestation within and among groups. The dual track continues to embrace the normative components of interactive universalism—respect and reciprocity—but it adds the notion of voluntary self-ascription: citizens self-identify in these tracks and retain the freedom to exit. This track encompasses social movements, kitchen-counter conversations, probably cyberspace chat rooms, and any place we get together in a non-institutional public space. This track parallels a wider space of legislative and judicial bodies, longstanding

institutions. Between the two, of course, we're trying to deliberate what we can do. Working to make the dual track more vibrant will widen public space and encourage a broader agenda. "What should be on the public agenda as opposed to determining justice issues in advance?" To answer that, we must attend to the plural and contested nature of cultural groups themselves.

Again, the key for Benhabib is that the process itself is formative. I wouldn't say that she's not interested in consensus, but that's not her focus. Her focus is on a formative process that has enough normative constraints to encourage participation with less fear. Participants become more willing to risk their views. Participants slowly expand, not only their ability to think beyond their traditional norms, but also to widen the circle of their concern. Over time, this becomes a discursive way of life. This is a utopian vision, of course it is, but it's a vision of the process as formative in ways that people will want to know another view and will want to think more expansively. They will want to live peaceably with one another.

*Our lives seem to move much more quickly with advancing technologies. Do you think people may lose the will to make an ethical choice in a moment of fatigue?*

Sometimes it's more than lack of will. Sometimes it's hatred born of fear, and the violence that this fear unleashes today, both in the perpetrators and in the victims. Technology speeds up the process by which we discover that we all have dirty hands.

We can engage in the historical cycle of retaliation much more quickly now. Historically, the cycle of retaliation attached to the revenge model of justice has worked against any global vision of how to talk about peaceful solutions. Also, historically, deliberations over global violence have not been inclusive enough to legitimate the use of state power to address violence with more violence. When we examine who's doing the deliberating, it hasn't been very inclusive, because it is focused on maintaining power. Global discussions at the nation-state level assume that the protection of sovereign power is key. If I'm going to engage in a truly inclusive process on the international level, I've got to be willing to share and not hoard this power. I'm at risk here, because if I engage in this deliberation, I'm going to be bound by the outcome and maybe I don't want to be. This diminishes good faith negotiations.

*How can we engage communication ethics in our relationships with others to accomplish pragmatic outcomes toward social change?*

I'm back to communication ethics as a form of moral argumentation. How do we encourage that view of it? The biggest fear of argumentation that many have is the worry that cherished beliefs and values will be lost forever. Conversely, I may not want to argue with my friends or acquaintances because I'm afraid I'm going to destroy these relationships. Pragmatically, our task is to show people communication ethics as moral argumentation can be fun, is not necessarily destructive of relationships and is not necessarily going to mean the end of all we hold dear.

Yes, argumentation is a risk, and I think we'd be disingenuous to say otherwise. Many people want to live peaceably, and if we're going to live peaceably, we not only have to be willing to engage difference, we are well served to locate a few kernels of common humanity. There are some things humans share and many find a great deal of joy when they discover some shared concerns and aspirations. This might partially account for the pleasure many find in reading history—for that shock of recognition that somebody 5000 years ago thought like you did, shared your current hopes and dreams and fears. If we can cultivate our dialogical courage to enter the conversation, to risk both comforting and surprising outcomes, then the potential outcomes are valuable.

For me, the primary ethical commitment arises in the view that we are made, at least in part, in discourse. If we can continue to theorize communication patterns that enable people in conversation and in debate to reflect carefully on how narratives form identity, and to open a space for reforming that identity, then we have done good work as teachers and scholars.

### Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1934.
- . *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Trans. George A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993.
- . *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995.
- Benhabib, Seyla. *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

- . *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens*. Oxford, UK: Cambridge UP, 2004.
- . *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2002.
- Berlin, Isaiah. *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998.
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *Cicero: De Oratore*. Trans. E. W. Sutton. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1942.
- Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Ed. John Cottingham. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Dryzek, John S. *Discursive Democracy: Politics, Policy, and Political Science*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1994.
- Dunne, Joseph. *Back to the Rough Ground: 'Phronesis' and 'Techne' in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1993.
- Glover, Jonathan, and Martha Nussbaum, eds. *Women, Culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1996.
- Gutmann, Amy, and Dennis Thompson. *Why Deliberative Democracy?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Trans. William Rehg. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1996.
- Jonsen, Albert R., and Stephen Toulmin. *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1990.
- Kant, Immanuel. "Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals." *Kant Selections*. Ed. L. W. Beck. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988. 237-298.
- Morris, David B. "How to Speak Postmodern: Medicine, Illness, and Cultural Change." *The Hastings Center Report* 30 (Nov/Dec 2000). 7-16.
- Nussbaum, Martha. "Human Capabilities: Female Human Beings." *Women, Culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*. Eds. Jonathan Glover and Martha Nussbaum. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1996. 61-104.
- Okin, Susan Moller. *Justice, Gender and the Family*. New York: Basic Books, 1989.
- Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1980.
- Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Boston, MA: Harvard UP, 1989.
- Toulmin, Stephen. *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.



Copyright of Exploring Communication Ethics is the property of Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.