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Interpersonal Communication Ethics

The Relationship Matters

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> In the light of the idea of authenticity, it would seem that having
> merely instrumental relationship is to act in a self-stultifying way. The
> notion that one can pursue one's fulfillment in this way seems illusory,
> in somewhat the same way as the idea that one can choose oneself
> without recognizing a horizon of significance beyond choice. (Taylor,
> 1991, p. 52)

Interpersonal communication ethics differentiates itself from other
forms of communication ethics by attentive concern for the relation-
ship between persons. Interpersonal communication finds its identity
in the ethical mandate to protect and promote the good of the relation-
ship. When the interaction no longer nourishes the relationship, inter-
personal communication moves into another form of communicative
interaction. This particular understanding of interpersonal communi-
cation attends to the good of relationship as the carrier of identity of
the communicative exchange, situating the exchange within an ethical
framework.

❖ INTRODUCTION

This chapter suggests that the implicit interpersonal communication mandate to protect and promote the good of relationship shifts to an explicit defining feature of interpersonal communication, simultaneously defining interpersonal communication ethics. Protecting and promoting the good of relationship, however, does not presume interpersonal agreement. One can abide by an interpersonal communication ethic that protects and promotes a given good, a given understanding of a relationship, and not garner the approval of one's communicative partner. This chapter moves interpersonal communication ethics outside the realm of subject and object or the one enacting relational care and the recipient of relational care to a gestalt understanding of relational attentiveness and care. Interpersonal communication ethics rejects both the realm of self-approval, what Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) called "emotivism" (p. 11), decision making by personal preference, and an exaggerated need for relational approval from the Other that can lead to interpersonal colonization. Interpersonal communication ethics calls forth a responsibility toward the notion of relationship that is owned by neither the self nor the Other. In short, interpersonal communication ethics is not about "me" or "you"; it is about a co-constituted communicative benchmark or standard that calls both parties to accountability for something that defines interpersonal communication—the relationship.

There are multiple forms of communication, with one form, interpersonal communication, privileging the relationship as the interpretive guide to information. Not all communication is or should be interpersonal in nature, but when interpersonal discourse centers the conversation, relationship takes center stage. When interpersonal discourse is the communicative task, the relationship becomes the heart of the exchange, tempering the gathering and use of information.

This chapter connects the study of interpersonal ethics to communicative practices with attention to the following three metaphors of communication ethics praxis:

1. **Interpersonal communication**—works with the good of the relationship between and among a small number of people (two to four).

2. **Distance**—provides necessary space for each communicative partner to contribute to the relationship.

3. **Interpersonal responsibility**—begins with each person's commitment to active care for the interpersonal relationship, owned by neither and nurtured with or without the support of the Other. Interpersonal responsibility adheres to the insight of Emmanuel Levinas, abandoning the expectation of reciprocity for attentiveness to a call to responsibility with or without the approval of the Other.

Student Application: Relational Responsibility

Interpersonal communication pervades our lives. Each relationship calls for unique levels of distance and different responsibilities. Each college student enters a time in life when **distance** with family members and close high school friends begins to emerge. Distance ultimately changes these relationships, permitting a form of engagement appropriate to a new stage of life. Some close high school friends disappear from our lives until there is a break in the semester, and other friendships become stronger and last throughout our college years and beyond. In each case, **interpersonal responsibility** involves caring for an interpersonal relationship. As one seeks a path in life, interpersonal relationship responsibility invites a balance between distance and closeness in each relationship, which defines the quality of our interpersonal lives (Stewart, 2006).

❖ INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

The study of interpersonal communication encompasses a variety of theories, approaches, and topics. Definitions of interpersonal communication range from the close and intimate (e.g., Miller & Steinberg, 1975) to the public (Arnett, 2001). Theoretical approaches as diverse as dialogic (e.g., Anderson et al., 1994; Anderson et al., 2004), social exchange (Roloff, 1981), uncertainty reduction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger & Gudykunst, 1991), social approaches (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995), and communibiological (Beatty, McCroskey, & Valencic, 2001) populate the scholarly landscape of interpersonal communication. The most recent *Handbook* of *Interpersonal Communication*, now in its

third edition (Knapp & Daly, 2002), identifies the current state of research in interpersonal communication, representing scholarship primarily from a quantitative perspective. Reviews generated over the past decades (e.g., Ayres, 1984; Roloff & Anastasiou, 2001) offer a number of organizing frameworks through which to understand the rich and diverse area of interpersonal communication study. Additionally, Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery (1996) offer a thoughtful discussion and critique of approaches to interpersonal communication.

This chapter works with a minimal set of coordinates in the discussion of interpersonal communication: a small number of communicators, interest in maintaining a relationship among the communicators, and attentiveness to historical situation (topic and contextual constraints). Theorists discuss differences in interaction and communication dynamics when the number of communicators in a context moves beyond two (e.g., see Miller & Steinberg, 1975). Traditional approaches to interpersonal communication include the contextual, in which the nature of communication is defined by the number of communicators, and the developmental, assessed by the closeness of the relationship as it progresses toward greater intimacy. Our position is closest to the developmental view, although our understanding of development does not revolve around psychological intimacy, but on increasing recognition of the nature of relational responsibility emerging between and/or among communicative partners.

Our view of interpersonal communication begins with three basic assumptions. The first is that interpersonal communication is but one form of communication. We do not connect all dyad exchanges with the term *interpersonal communication.* When the relationship is primary, interpersonal communication guides the encounter, but when some other communicative good, such as discourse directed toward accomplishing an organizational goal, is primary, and relationship care assumes the form of client attentiveness, a vehicle used for maximizing profit, the communicative exchange comes closer to "business and professional communication." We do recognize, however, that relationship care occurs in both private and public contexts. We do not limit interpersonal communication to private discourse alone (see Bridge & Baxter, 1992); interpersonal attentiveness to relationships often defies neat categorizations.

The second assumption is that interpersonal communication nourishes the relationship in order to bond responsibility between persons, not to further careers or advance political agendas. This view of interpersonal communication is deliberately narrow, permitting us to differentiate it from other useful and different communicative forms that may involve dyadic communication.

The third assumption is the recognition that there are multiple ways to study interpersonal communication within the discipline of communication. This chapter acknowledges the foundational work on interpersonal communication developed by authors such as Charles Brown and Paul Keller, Gerald Miller, John Stewart, Charles Berger, Julia Wood, Barnett Pearce, and Leslie Baxter, to name but a few. Their work represents multiple methodological and epistemological approaches to interpersonal communication, including social scientific (both quantitative and qualitative), rhetorical, and philosophical perspectives. Even though the investigative strategies are different and, at times, in contention, there is a common heart within these approaches—the relationship matters in interpersonal communication.

We understand interpersonal communication as relational nurture, with the assumption that relationships need to grow and change and negotiate a variety of complex dialectical tensions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Information, the demands of context—even the speakers themselves—take a subordinate position to a privileged good—the relationship. One does not engage interpersonal communication ethics when the good of relationship does not guide the exchange; at such moments, another form of communication dominates. Clearly, interpersonal communication does not happen in all places where one might assume it finds its home, such as in families or communities of worship. Interpersonal communication ethics has a pristine view of relationship—less driven by social exchange than by desire to assist the relationship without expected utility or reward. Levinas is correct; it is burden that adds meaning and insight to a life well-lived.

Interpersonal communication takes place wherever privileged concern for the relationship guides family members, business partners, friends, musicians, or athletes to attend to the good of relationship. The privileging of relationship begins, ironically, with the necessity of interpersonal distance (Buber, 1966b). Relationships need space for growth and change, an assumption that runs counter to popular assumptions of the need for "closeness" in relationships (Arnett, 2002). Perhaps the difference between relationship care and interpersonal domination rests in a willingness to cultivate space for relationship growth and change.

❖ DISTANCE

The particular nature of a relationship and its constitution matters, as does the type and form of communication. One major meta-communication ethics assumption is that one cannot impose a singular form

of communication on all interactions—not all communication episodes and contexts are the same. We often unknowingly make an unethical communicative move in demanding a particular form of communication in a setting that does not naturally, appropriately, or even pragmatically call forth such a form of communication. Note that the unethical lies with the demand, not with a mistake. One can mistakenly engage the wrong communication without ethical infraction; the ethical question arises only in the demand of the communication to fit "my" approval.

One of the practical ways to lessen the impulse for demand is to recognize the interpersonal importance of distance. As one holds an object too close to one's eyes, the details fade and blur together. It is only with distance in place that one is able to see more clearly. The old adage that absence makes the heart grow fonder has much to do with our losing sight of the importance of a person or institution due to too much proximity.

Distance permits us to see the details more clearly. The particular matters so much that one must honor distance, permitting one to see with clarity. As Martin Buber (1966b) warned, beware of the person who overruns reality. "Overrunning reality" means attempting to be closer than time, interaction, and interests have yet made possible. When we overrun reality, we lose the sense of distance necessary for careful relational growth. Distance is necessary if we are to honor what we meet; otherwise, we attempt to turn the Other into ourselves. All of us know people who are consistently "ahead of themselves"; such persons are difficult to teach, befriend, or advise. This point is important, for in our culture we too often misuse interpersonal skills to decrease distance between persons. Buber would suggest that such a move dishonors the Other, missing the uniqueness of contribution that the Other can bring to the table of conversation. When you get too far out in front of yourself, you lose perspective on what you do not know.

Generally, we conceptualize distance as nothing more than empty space. More accurately, it is the ontological home of the communicative relationship between persons. In the case of interpersonal communication, distance is the ontological home of a particular relationship that is nurtured and permitted to change naturally. Laurie Moroco (2005) addresses the importance of phenomenological distance in interpersonal relationships, permitting appropriate space to texture relational development.

When one of the authors was small, his father would take him fishing. The boat had to go very slowly in a lake full of logs and stumps, obstructions that made navigation difficult and, simultaneously, created excellent conditions for fishing. Frequently, the distance between where the boat started and the perfect fishing spot seemed to take

forever to traverse. Slowly, they covered a distance that never seemed to decrease, and as soon as they had fished in one spot for a while, the father moved to another. Years later, that young boy, now a grown man, can remember catching only a few fish, yet literally hundreds were caught—primarily large-mouth bass. What now remains in memory is what was always in the distance, that which occupied the "space" between here and there, which became the here leading to another there. Logs floating, birds perched upon them, turtles sitting on the logs, an occasional water snake, moss, waves, the shoreline, grass, the changing colors of the water, the sun, and two companions, a father and a son. It is in the distance between the here and the there that memories live. It is what happens in the distance between the here and the there that shapes the texture and richness of a life—and a relationship.

Bob Hope, an American comedian and actor, sang for decades a song of gratitude, "Thanks for the Memories." Philosophically, distance makes memories possible. Saying "thanks for the memories" is akin to giving thanks for what happened between a here and a there. Relationship, as understood in this chapter, requires a responsibility for memories that change both through shifts in perspective and through additive adjustments of novel experiences that enter and alter one's memory—in this case, an interpersonal communication memory called "relationship" that lives in an ontological home of distance.

Distance is interpersonal space that nourishes the very thing that keeps persons together interpersonally—relationship. The distance between us is an ethical responsibility, not a flaw or a limitation. Distance is the home of our responsibility—in this case, responsibility for an interpersonal relationship. Now, consider again the father who took his son fishing—he nurtured a relationship as a dad that called him to love the outdoors, hard work, and dependability. Today, what is missed after so many years later is his interpersonal responsibility that never let him forget what he should do as a dad, or, in the words of this chapter, the importance and the power of distance—the holder of a relational call. He nurtured a relationship that lives beyond death.

The importance of distance keeps us from equating interpersonal communication with ever more closeness. It is possible to be concerned about a relationship with another and use multiple ways of attending to the heart of the interpersonal life of those persons together. The assumption of interpersonal communication ethics is that no matter how close the relationship, the space for distance, the space for distinctiveness of persons and home of relational responsibility between persons, is needed. For instance, when the son of one of the authors was young, he asked the following question: "Dad, are you my friend?" The

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answer given quickly was, of course, "Yes." Then, as the conversation continued, the dad remembered his relational responsibility and offered a correction. "Son, I love you. You can count on me as your friend unless I must choose between friendship and being your dad. If I must lose your friendship to help you as your dad, I will do so without a blink." The relationship mandated by being a dad and a son trumps friendship in this interpersonal exchange between father and son; responsibility for a particular type of relationship keeps the heart of this interpersonal communication nourished. Distance calls us to nourish a relationship that is historically appropriate, not necessarily the definition of relationship that we demand of the Other or want for ourselves. The interpersonal relationship calls us to do what we consider necessary—in this case, as a parent, not as a high school companion. Interpersonally, the relationship we have with another matters—it is the defining ethic in our interpersonal communication, and it is our ethical responsibility to nurture that relationship.

❖ INTERPERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Ernest Boyer, when working as the director of the Carnegie Institute for Teaching, was asked to define the conditions for student success: "What makes a great student?" The answer was not what a crowd of educators expected. Arnett (1992) reports his response: "He replied, 'A parent, friend, teacher, or someone significant offering a sense of hope that the young person is worthwhile and can and will succeed'" (p. 102). A mom, dad, brother, sister, cousin, teacher, coach, religious leader—anyone who says, "Come hell or high water, I am with you and will help you succeed." Such a mentor becomes a champion, facilitating a relationship that assists the Other. Interpersonal communication from an ethical standpoint is not about saying the "right" thing or looking as if one has all the ideas worked out; it is simply about not losing sight of a key ingredient—my relational responsibility to the Other.

The ethical dimension of interpersonal communication moves the focus from relationship alone to responsibility for the relationship, a relationship that is about something—for instance, in the previous example, the "something" is success against all odds. This chapter attends to the "habits of the interpersonal heart," a relation that calls forth our responsibility. We often hear someone complaining that another person does not have good interpersonal skills. This chapter defines the interpersonal good as attending to responsibility appropriate for a given relationship. An interpersonal ethic is not the same as an interpersonal aesthetic/style

that seeks to "win friends." This chapter privileges responsibility for a "relationship of" that one seeks to nourish over the Other's "feeling good" and one's own "feeling good." Aesthetically appealing and "feel good" discourse have a place, but they are not the same as relationally responsible interpersonal communication in which attentive concern for the relationship trumps how one appears as a communicator.

The ethics of interpersonal communication moves interpersonal communication to the realm of responsibility for the relationship. Placed in ethical language, the move from interpersonal style to interpersonal responsibility for the relationship highlights the difference between personality and character. Good personality, or interpersonal style, linked with interpersonal responsibility, or character, leads to long-term relational health; good personality without character forgoes the long-term obligation to attend to relational responsibility, forging a form of interpersonal sophistry marked by style alone and absence of interpersonal ethics—for the relationship is the content that guides character in an interpersonal ethic.

The good that interpersonal communication ethics carries is that of the relationship. The notion of responsibility engages a communicator with an ethical charge to attend to practices that bind a given relationship together. The conceptual irony of this manner of understanding interpersonal communication is that something other than the Other's perception must guide the interaction. This view of interpersonal communication does not place liking as primary, but, instead, responsible engagement of a given relationship. What does it mean to be a teacher, a mom, a friend, a colleague? In each case, one asks what the necessary relationship is and how one can work interpersonally to nourish the relationship that one seeks to support. In each case, it is the relationship that takes on a sense of particularity, the defining characteristic of the notion "relationship of"—the particular characteristics of an emergent "relationship between" with a defining preposition.

The Particular Matters

The focus of attention in this view of interpersonal communication is both simple and demanding—how does one support, enhance, and nourish a relationship that exists between two persons? The first assumption in interpersonal communication from the standpoint of interpersonal communication ethics is that the nature of the relationship matters. As an earlier example stated, a dad is not necessarily a friend, and a student is not necessarily one's colleague, and on and on; the particular relationship matters. Levinas (2000) addresses this

concern in his work *Proper Names.* The naming matters. Naming announces the relationship of dad, teacher, student, or friend. The proper name begins with a general reminder of a relationship played out in the particular between persons. When I say the terms *son* and *daughter,* they unite the general immediately with the reality of particular faces. The works of George Herbert Mead and Seyla Benhabib give additional insight into the difference between a "Generalized Other" and a "particular other," with an interpersonal ethic gathering strength, meaning, and direction from the particular relationship. The particular matters in the shaping of the relationship. As persons and historical circumstances change, the relationship shifts as well.

The particular shaping of a given relationship results in a call to a particular communicative responsibility. As a relationship changes, so does one's responsibility, redirecting and reshaping the interpersonal communication taking place within it. Emmanuel Levinas states that ethics begins with action that displays "I am my brother's keeper" (Cohen, 1998, p. xii; Levinas, 1998). How one lives out that relational calling is dependent upon the particular demands before the communicative partners. Interpersonal relationship lives not in the abstract, but in the particular; the exact nature of what is ethical in interpersonal communication lives within a unique particular that changes with persons, time, and the historical demands before us.

Hesed **and the Shadows of Demand**

Interpersonal communication ethics presupposes that one cannot impose a particular type of relationship on another, nor can one demand a relationship from another. To impose or to demand a particular type of relationship violates the spirit of interpersonal communication. Relationship development in interpersonal communication requires attentive care without the specter of demand. Relationship development in interpersonal communication lives by *hesed,* a Hebrew term that suggests that something must be done for the good of the community (in this case, the relationship), but cannot be demanded. To permit demand to govern all interpersonal interaction moves such discourse into technique- and image-centered communication, forgetting one's responsibility to the relationship. In interpersonal communication, the only long-term protection for the communicative partners is a commitment to a relationship nourished by hesed—relationship responsibility enacted without response to the demand of the Other, attentive to the demand of the proper name of a given relational connection.

Interpersonal communication lives within a space of multiple hesed commitments. First, the relationship cannot be demanded, and second, there is an irony in that one cannot demand that no demand ever be uttered. Interpersonal communication ethics is the place of occasional demands.

One cannot make the demand that there *never* be a relational demand in interpersonal communication. Upon occasion, in interpersonal communication ethics, one can demand that another attend to a relationship that has seemingly gone unattended. This demand works as a rhetorical interruption, calling for a change in one or both parties' focus of attention. A demand, however, cannot sustain an interpersonal relationship long term; eventually, and sooner rather than later, the concern for relationship development must return once again to hesed status. To make repeated demands for a given communicative action is to move the communicative gesture into something quite different from interpersonal communication. Both demand and the notion of hesed have unique characteristics that guide communicative life in interpersonal communication ethics.

Undue demand lives in the rush to turn a new acquaintance into a friendship without letting the relationship develop on its own. "You will be my friend now!" destroys the fragile structure of an emerging relationship. The narrow ridge upon which interpersonal relationship engagement finds its balance defines the "unity of contraries," such as the necessity of relationship and impossibility of its long-term demand (Buber, 1948). The question of how to engage another interpersonally is answered within the terms of the relationship and a caution to beware of "overrunning [the] reality" (Buber, 1966a, p. 65) of relationship limits at a given time in a given moment. Relationships change, but most often on their own without our forcing or making a particular relationship materialize. We can invite. We can demand on occasion, never forgetting that we cannot own the relationship or our image of what we demand that relationship to be.

Persistent demand without attentive change from the Other moves interpersonal communication from relational attentiveness to relational obsession and control, terminating an interpersonal communication relationship that gives way to a darker, more insistent form of interpersonal interaction that this chapter deems *interpersonal colonization* and that Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) term "the dark side" of interpersonal relationships and attraction. In short, it is not demand that is problematic, but the movement of the occasional act of demand that offers a needed rhetorical interruption to demand as the normative foundation of an interpersonal relationship, moving us from interpersonal

communication to interpersonal colonization. Just as we cannot demand dialogue at all moments, neither can we demand interpersonal relational attention as we would prefer it, on our own terms, at all times.

It is the shadow side of interpersonal communication, propelled by persistent demand, that reconfigures interpersonal communication ethics into something else temporarily masquerading as relational concern. Yet it is the shadows, the possibility of demand not enacted, that give power and meaning to the light of relationship sustained by hesed. For example, you may not appreciate your friend's constant nagging to spend more time together. Yet the awareness that your friend desires your company as a friend points to the value of the relationship.

Without demand, relationships suffer, and with constant demand, relationships cease to have the character of what this chapter calls *interpersonal communication ethics.* Demand emerges from the propelling force of desire for the relationship with a particular Other. If one is unconcerned about the Other or the relationship with the Other, one simply does not care. On the other hand, constant demand does not permit a space for response to a particular Other to emerge. Demand creates a focus of attention on the relationship that becomes too intense for hesed to emerge and stifles a sense of voluntary engagement from reciprocal desire. Constant demand creates a different sort of bond from relational concern. Our misuse of demand plays itself out in our undue confidence in learning interpersonal skills more as an effort to "win friends and influence people" (Carnegie, 1936/1981) than as a call to responsibility to nurture a relationship.

The Limits of Interpersonal Skills

Consistency of demand takes the relationship into one's own hands, moving from interpersonal communication that requires co-constituting communicative life together to a unilateral focus—"my" image of what should be. Such is the danger of too much emphasis on interpersonal communication skills. No skill is the sole answer to all problems and demands before us. Interpersonal skills are not exempt from the reality of limits. The line between working with another and manipulating another vanishes when one takes on too much responsibility for the Other's communication and response. The key to interpersonal communication is invitation to relationship building, not smooth discourse at all costs. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) recognize the complicated nature of interpersonal relationships in their work on relational dialectics, highlighting the messiness and unpredictability of

relational dynamics. They remind us of the difficulty of a goal of undue control of the communicative process with another.

Additionally, interpersonal communication ethics recognizes responsibility to the relationship, not demands that one makes on the Other. Interpersonal communication ethics does not live long on the ground of demand to meet "my" standards and my understanding of a relational reality owned by neither partner in the communicative action. This chapter suggests that an advertisement for a position in the business world refrain from asking for "outstanding interpersonal communication skills" and request, instead, "good business and professional communication skills," which do have a demand component. The notion of business and professional communication requires adherence to a public standard of discourse and interaction.

The key to interpersonal communication ethics is not "Who has the best communication skills?" or "Who communicates in the way I think best?" The key to interpersonal communication ethics lies in the answer to this question: "Do given persons work to honor a relationship, whatever the consequences?" If the relationship changes, one's responsibility has to change. The guiding key is the relationship, which works as a beacon calling forth our responsibility to the Other. Interpersonal communication ethics rests not in our hopes or wishes, or those of another, but in something that we invite and can never create alone, a relationship that calls us to responsibility.

Wanda and her good friend Stacy are about to leave a party. Wanda notices that Stacy is too impaired by alcohol to drive safely. Wanda says to herself, "I know my responsibility to this relationship. I will not let my friend drive home in this condition." In that moment of interpersonal communication ethics, one does not know whether the Other will approve or even be willing to keep the friendship; however, at that moment, it is not the delight of the Other that drives one's action, but a standard much more powerful and demanding—the heartbeat of responsibility for the Other calling us forth in a phenomenon properly named "relationship." In interpersonal communication ethics, relationships matter, as Brown and Keller (1973) highlight in *Monologue to Dialogue: An Exploration of Interpersonal Communication:*

> We rest our lives on our values, the vaporous wings of a prayer. These values must be confirmed by others or they die and we die. Research has demonstrated time and again that each of us is unique in our perceptions, there being no more alikeness among friends than among strangers or enemies. Friends are united and confirmed in their common ideals. (p. 206)

In interpersonal communication ethics, the common ideal begins with a relationship that both consider worthy of responsibility, a responsibility that keeps the difference between character and personality ever present in interpersonal life together.

Pointing to a Dialogic Ethic in Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication ethics points to a dialogic ethic in the manner of listening, attentiveness, and negotiation. The following model summarizes a dialogic ethic applied to interpersonal communication in relationships, highlighting major points in this chapter.

1. *Listening without demand: What is happening in a given moment?* Whether we like or dislike that moment, we must engage the question(s) of a given moment. Interpersonal communication ethics is wary of demand, even of the demand to do away with all demands. The importance of hesed frames an interpersonal communication ethic attentive to a particular relationship. The form of the relationship is not subject to our demand or our interpersonal communication preference. We engage the relationship in its particularity.

2. *Attentiveness: What are the coordinating grounds upon which stand the self, the Other, and the historical moment?* Attentiveness to relationship and the kind of relationship, "relationship of," is the defining feature that centers the good of an interpersonal communication ethic.
   a. *The ground of self (the ethical/narrative commitments that guide us)*, and
   b. *The ground of Other (the ethical/narrative commitments that guide the Other).* The ethical ground that shapes interpersonal communication ethics for self and Other is a commitment to something beyond the communicative partners, to a relationship that defines communicative life together.
   c. *The ground of the historical moment (elements of the time in which we live, including "relational time" of the persons in conversation).* A relationship is not static and must change with the demands of the historical moment. In fact, this view of relationship makes it akin to a phantom; it is there and ever changing, denying our impulse to reify it into a given, demanded, solidified state.

3. *Dialogic negotiation: What temporal communication ethics answers emerge "between" persons, pointing to communicative options for action,*

belief, and understanding? The interpersonal understanding of a relationship must be negotiated anew in friendships, in relationships with significant others, and with parents. Negotiation reminds us of the consistency of change that "I" can never control, but that "we" must negotiate together.

4. *Listening, attentiveness, and dialogic negotiation constitute temporal dialogic ethical competence. What worked, and what changes might now assist?*
   a. *Evaluation/self-reflection (reflection upon one's own ethical/narrative commitments).* Attending to the question of what we do in interpersonal communication ethics is a deliberate self-reflection. It is akin to the self writing that Foucault (1997) challenged us to do habitually. In this case, the evaluation is up to "me," not "us," or otherwise we fall into the temptation of demand once again under the guise of "just doing evaluation."
   b. *From knowledge to learning (the key is not to tell, but to learn from the Other, the historical moment, and reflective understanding of communicative action).* There is no interpersonal communication ethic that is set in stone; as the relationship changes, so do our responsibilities. The key is to link the relationship with the responsibilities.

5. *Dialogic ethics listens to what is before the relational partners, attends to the historical moment, and seeks to negotiate new possibilities. Dialogic ethics is a conceptual form of marketplace engagement, ever attentive to conversational partners and their "ground," the historical moment, and the emerging "possible" that takes place in the "between" of human meeting.* Interpersonal communication ethics listens to relationship needs, limits demands, connects responsibility to the relationship, and attends to the inevitability of change. In interpersonal communication ethics, the responsible "I" follows what Michael Hyde (2001) called a call of conscience—in this case, connecting one's interpersonal responsibility to a particular understanding of a given relationship, ever attentive to the inevitability of change.

❖   COMMUNICATION ETHICS: REFLECTION AND ACTION

1. Assess three of your interpersonal relationships in terms of each person's relational responsibility to the self, the Other, and the relationship.

2. Consider these three relationships again. How has each relationship been negotiated at different points in its "relational time"?

3. What hesed commitments are engaged in these three relationships? Recall that hesed refers to things that must be done for the good of the relationship, but cannot be demanded.

4. Consider a favorite motion picture, or one that you have recently viewed, that features an interpersonal relationship. Assess this relationship according to the model of dialogic ethics presented at the end of this chapter.

5. Working with one or two other students, identify a scenario that you believe is a common interpersonal communication ethics challenge encountered in everyday life. Identify elements of the model of dialogic ethics at the end of this chapter that are relevant to the scenario you identified. Take turns enacting responses that represent elements of interpersonal communication ethics discussed in this chapter.

❖   ENGAGING COMMUNICATION ETHICS
     THROUGH LITERATURE: *LES MISÉRABLES*

Les Misérables understood as a novel about interpersonal communication ethics opens a creative window into interpersonal relationship responsibility. As one's relationship changes, the responsibility that one has for the Other also changes. When Jean Valjean, galley slave of 19 years recently released from prison, finds a place to stay at the bishop's home—a bishop known as Bishop Bienvenu (whose name translates to English as "Welcome")—he steals silverware, runs away in the night, and is captured with the property in his possession. After the capture, Jean Valjean finds himself with the authorities back at the bishop's front door. The bishop is ever so happy to see him, stating to the police that the silverware was a gift to Jean Valjean, but that he "forgot" to take with him two silver candlesticks, which he was now glad to give to

Valjean. It is the relationship of a Bishop of Welcome to a man with an embittered soul that begins the novel. Jean Valjean eventually shifts his life, working to assist others at his own expense.

When the Bishop of Welcome meets Jean Valjean, both distance and responsibility mark their engagement. The formal title of "Monsieur"——"sir"——by which the bishop addresses this newly released convict offers the space of dignity to a wounded soul. Without prying into the details of Valjean's life and intentions, the bishop offers a public welcome of distance. Upon the gendarmes' return of Valjean after apprehending him with the stolen silverware, the bishop protects and promotes the good of the relationship. He enacts the relational responsibility he took on the previous evening by permitting distance again, this time distance from Valjean's intention of theft. The bishop grants distance from even the individual intention of Jean Valjean, offering the possibility of a renewed relationship "between" the two. As Valjean leaves, the good of the relationship endures through time as the bishop tells Valjean to use the resources to become an honest man.

In *Les Misérables,* interpersonal communication ethics directed toward the good of relationship emerges over and over. Marius and his grandfather, when we first encounter them, have essentially destroyed their relationship. Their political disagreements result in conflict that drives them apart. Near the end of the novel, Marius's grandfather, overjoyed to find that Marius is alive, communicates with him in a very different way. Together, Marius and his grandfather reconstruct their interpersonal relationship, and the discourse of each honors the good of the relationship.

In reading the novel, one walks into an interpersonal world of responsibility for relationship. The bishop nourished a relationship of welcome without the certainty that the crippled spirit before him would change, but with knowledge that his responsibility to this man called him to compassionate action. Throughout the novel, Valjean continues to nourish a relationship based upon gratitude, responsive to a Bishop of Welcome. The echo of the bishop's interpersonal responsibility takes Jean Valjean into a world of burden taken up for others with a reason to help, and even suffer, all in the quiet name of a relationship that shaped his action from a distance. Somehow, the gift of the candlesticks brought a flicker of light, becoming more like an eternal flame that illuminates places where only shadows would otherwise rest. The bishop's act of passing the candlesticks offers light that brought a new sense of sight, permitting attention to others, no longer masking the good of interpersonal responsibility "for."