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Dialogic Ethics

Meeting Differing Grounds of the “Good”



Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak had been denied them. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression. (Freire, 1972, p. 88)

This chapter presents dialogic ethics as pragmatically necessary in a time in which multiple communication ethics identify this historical moment. Our time lives with differing narrative and virtue structures, placing any communication ethics theory within the realm of limits and temporality, unable to offer guidance for decision making in all places and for all time. A communication ethics theory offers grounded reasons for particular actions in a given moment. Specifically, dialogic ethics is a historically responsive answer to differing ethical backgrounds that situate contrary and contrasting senses of the “good.” Living with the routine of change and difference, we must remember that we are not the first people or historical era to live within the ongoing presence of difference,

but we may be the first to live in an era whose public discourse and scholarship are defined by the acknowledgment of difference. This work engages the mantra of difference with a pragmatic spirit, privileging learning. Our discussion of dialogic ethics emphasizes a pragmatic need for learning more from the Other, alterity, and difference. Our view of dialogic ethics assumes a minimalist and modest agenda, to learn from difference—such learning is our entrance into communication ethics in action in this historical moment.

❖ INTRODUCTION

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

1. **Dialogue and difference**—begin with the ground under our feet, the narrative that gives shape to what we consider good, and learning from the ground of the Other, calling us to attend to the meaning emergent in the meeting of a given historical moment. Difference is the key to learning and living well in a postmodern culture. Difference is the energy that makes dialogue possible.
2. **Dialogic theory**—situates background assumptions about dialogue in three major elements of human meeting: the different grounds/narratives from which self and Other begin the conversation and the emergent temporal answer given life by the meeting of such difference.
3. **Dialogic coordinates**—suggest communicative elements needed to invite dialogue; these five coordinates are learning from listening, refraining from the demand that dialogue take place, acknowledging bias, recognizing that not all communication is or should be in the form of dialogue, and keeping content and learning foremost. Invitation guides the basic assumption of dialogic ethics.
4. **Dialogic ethics**—assumes the importance of the meeting of communicative ground that gives rise to a particular sense of good and is simultaneously open to learning and emergent insight that belongs to an ontological reality

between persons, not to any one person in a conversation. Dialogic ethics begins with meeting what is before us—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Such an ethic rejects demand and the occasionally heard comment, “We need more dialogue.” This statement only ensures the impossibility of dialogic ethics, which hides from the ongoing demand made by oneself or another.

Student Application: Negotiating Difference

Throughout one’s educational experience, one encounters diversity—economic, racial, social, religious, and national, to name but a few domains of difference. Encountering someone different permits **dialogue**; one begins with understanding the narrative ground and commitments that anchor one’s own life and learning those of another. **Difference** is one key to learning, inside and outside of the classroom. In situations involving encounters with difference, **dialogic coordinates** emerge that invite one and another into dialogue. These moments occur as one walks with someone to the next class or finds a friend in a crowded lunch area, or as one grapples with ideas in the classroom. **Dialogic ethics** makes us aware of differences that occur in our day-to-day lives with others, fostering a continuing conversation with respect for other people and ideas, living out a commitment to learn from difference in daily conversation.

❖ DIALOGUE AND DIFFERENCE

A dialogic communication ethic begins with an understanding of dialogue responsive to content arising from narrative ground that anchors persons in conversation. Viktor Frankl (1963), whose entire project addressed human meaning, was fond of quoting Nietzsche’s statement—“To have a why is to bear any how” (p. 121). Dialogic ethics embraces the why and the how of engaging difference, framing learning as the foundation of the 21st century. Dialogic ethics is the meeting place for learning in an age of difference.

This era, which some call the crumbling of foundations and others, a time of foundations in contention, provides, ironically, one major foundation for this work—learning. Learning is the anchor in an era that rebels against universalistic foundations. Difference opens the door to learning. Dialogue opens the door to other persons and ideas.

In their edited volume on dialogue, Rob Anderson, Leslie Baxter, and Ken Cissna (2004) thoughtfully outline differing schools of dialogue encountered with regularity in the communication field. Our work situates dialogue within two (Buber and Gadamer) of the four traditions (Martin Buber, Hans Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, and Mikhail Bakhtin) outlined by these scholars. Additionally, this work brings two other contributors to the forefront of conversation about dialogic ethics: Paulo Freire and Hannah Arendt.

The Content of Dialogue

Buber (1955) defines the differences among monologue, technical dialogue, and dialogue as points along a continuum, with each defining relational distance and intimacy differently. All three are relational, but only dialogue responds to emergent insight between persons. Monologue looks to the self for answers, and technical dialogue looks to public feedback. Gadamer (1976) frames dialogue as a meeting of respectful difference—one's own bias meets that of another text or person, encountering Otherness, not similarity. Gadamer points to a "meeting of horizons" in which the bias of the interpreter and the text meet, requiring the attentive respect of each.

Freire (1972) reminds us of the liberating importance of dialogue for learning, employing face saving in order to keep the focus upon the learning, not upon fear and embarrassment (Arnett, 2002). Freire (1972) warns against the "banking concept" of learning and unreflective response to psychological demand in the service of making someone "feel better."

Arendt (1978) is not ordinarily considered a dialogic scholar; however, her contribution warns us against a "popular culture" view of dialogue that embraces first and foremost the importance of belonging to a social group; she writes about the person who wants acceptance so badly that reflection on whether or not the group is worth joining is forgotten. Dialogic ethics rejects belonging as a communication ethics first principle. The question that guides a dialogic ethic is, "To what do I want to belong?" Arendt gives us a term to understand the danger of wanting to belong too badly; the *parvenu* is the person willing to give up all in order to belong to a given social group. Recently having acquired social status or wealth, for example, this person wants to fit in but is considered an "upstart" or "pretender" by members of the group to which this person wants to belong. Arendt reminds us that the struggles and dangers of junior high do not subside with adulthood. We are often tempted to belong for the wrong reasons. Dialogic ethics keeps

the focus on content questions, such as, "To what do I want to belong, and why?" The persons, groups, and institutions with which we associate shape us and the narrative ground on which we stand. Our reflective consideration of the goods protected and promoted by those we seek to join opens our awareness of the implications of belonging to a given set of friends, a particular group, or an admired institution.

The insights of Buber, Gadamer, Freire, and Arendt provide our understanding of dialogue that extends to the Other and the historical moment, foregoing centering upon the self alone, attending instead to the demands for learning that surround us in a time of narrative and virtue contention. Dialogic ethics assumes that learning transforms us, catching us by surprise; such learning emerges out of the meeting of differing positions. Learning through engagement with the Other, with that which or whom we do not know, reshapes us. As we learn from difference, transformation and change reshape us. Think of those you know who have been transformed by learning—the absent-minded child who becomes a world-renowned musician, the awkward youngster who becomes a professional athlete, the "geek" who becomes a CEO. What these persons have in common is that learning transformed and reshaped their possibilities.

❖ DIALOGIC THEORY

This section outlines the interplay of multiple authors who shape our understanding of dialogue. We present core ideas for our engagement of Buber, Gadamer, Freire, and Arendt as an initial orientation connected to our dialogic ethics theme that privileges learning over unreflective belonging, beginning with the work of Buber.

Martin Buber

Buber suggests that dialogue lives outside of demand and is not "normative" in day-to-day interaction. Dialogue is not "the" way to communicate or a common mode of communication. Dialogue is only one way to communicate with another. Buber reminds us about the relational importance of monologue that seeks to tell with primary focus on what one already knows; of technical dialogue that seeks to encourage the exchange of information; and genuine dialogue, where insight emerges between persons, insight that belongs to neither one nor the other. Dialogic ethics assumes the importance of technical dialogue *and* genuine dialogue, considering the former what we can engage

regularly and the latter a human gift that brings insight and meaning beyond expectation. Dialogue is both the learning of technical dialogue and the gift-giving dialogue that emerges as a by-product, not planned or engineered, but ever so responsive to the unexpected moments of communicative encounter.

Contrary to its common denouncement, monologue has an important place in communicative life. There are times when the Other should “tell” us information; we simply take notes and listen. One of our colleagues uses lecture as the primary way of engaging learning in his classroom. We are supportive of him as he reminds students and us that monologue is a healthy and needed part of life. Ironically, to refuse ever to be part of a monologic environment makes dialogue impossible, turning dialogue into a demand. One of the authors of this book takes music lessons each week, and the teacher often goes on and on about music theory as if there were no one else in the room. Yet much is learned—notes, memory, and listening take the telling and turn it into learning. To demand that each exchange be dialogic is to overvalue one’s own significance. Yet when this same teacher works with young people, there is a reaching out that encourages their playing and practice. He begins not with theory, but with asking about their week and looking over the practice schedule that he asks them to record. He then asks them to evaluate how well they can play a given piece of music, connecting their evaluation to practice time. He works with them gently, with the music connected to practice. He works each week to link quality of performance with time spent on a given piece of music. Watching him work with a younger performer illustrates “technical dialogue” at work, and there is joy in watching the smile on the teacher’s face in the “telling” to his older student, bringing monologue into the conversation as a teacher and musician. If one wants to learn, then valuing monologue is a beginning. If we do not value another’s telling, we move to dialogue upon demand, and dialogue, by definition, resists the demand that communicative life meet “my” standards.

Buber moves the conversation to discuss the interplay of images in a relational exchange, involving six tacit communicative exchanges: my image of myself; my image of the Other; my image of the Other’s image of me; the Other’s image of the Other; the Other’s image of me; and the Other’s image of my image of the Other, illustrating different perspectives on self and other. When image no longer dominates, dialogue is possible. Yet the very effort to “try to be in dialogue” makes it impossible, keeping one’s image of oneself as a “dialogic person” more important than the dialogue itself. Much of life is more akin to technical dialogue than to “true” dialogue, attending to complexity of images

of self and other in informative exchange. Theories that seek to bring these images together thrive. For instance, John Stewart (2006) discusses a transactional model of communication that integrates these differing images. The insight of Pearce and Cronen (1980) in their depiction of the coordinated management of meaning reminds us of the ongoing complexity of bringing diverse perspectives together. The still groundbreaking work of George Herbert Mead (1962) in symbolic interaction theory details differing images of "I" and "me" (pp. 173–178), with the latter more attentive to image construction. Mead's work is particularly important; he considers communicative interaction the primary shaper of self-concept.

In essence, the six dimensions of image summarized by Buber point to a reality sustained by one theory after another. Images matter. Images must be negotiated, and one cannot confuse the notion of image with the engagement of human dialogue. A dialogic ethic begins with the assumption that one cannot take on the image of a "dialogic person," a "dialogue maker," or a "dialogue broker." To do so is to move dialogue into a disguise, the image of being dialogic. Much of life requires negotiating of images more akin to monologue or, at best, technical dialogue.

Suppose that Madison and Terrell have just been assigned to the same group for a class project related to service learning. They do not know each other at all; their initial encounters consist of small talk and opinions about the project, which involves interviewing children in after-school programs to determine learning needs. Each student works with images of self and others, negotiating images of concerned, collaborative group members. Terrell, however, does not want to appear overly eager to excel; he presents a different image.

Over the course of the term, Madison and Terrell engage in a great deal of technical dialogue focused on information relevant to the project. Sometimes, however, one of them will reveal something that generates a response in the other. For example, Terrell once remarked, "I am glad we are doing this project. I wish I had had this type of support in an after-school program when I was growing up." Madison then asked questions about Terrell's life; the two were surprised to discover that an entire hour had passed, with several new insights about each other and the project emerging in the process. Looking back on their experience, Madison states, "It is funny, but we never intended to get into such a deep discussion. I learned more about Terrell than I thought I would just working on this project. At first, I thought he just wanted to get the project done to fulfill the course requirement, but now I see that it means a lot to him. I also understand this project differently than I did at first, and that would not have happened without our discussions."

Images begin the conversation, and information emerging between persons offers an unexpected ending. The process of dialogue often begins in monologue and technical dialogue, only to surprise us with its emergence when least expected. If we move the conversation about images and dialogue to dialogue and difference, we open the discussion to the dialogic work of Gadamer, who reminds us of the importance of the bias to human communication and learning. Dialogue begins with difference.

Hans Gadamer

Gadamer (1976) begins dialogic engagement with the assumption that bias is central to human understanding. Biases guide our unique insights and contributions to everyday life. Gadamer rejects the assumption that we can or even should eliminate bias. The admission of bias and its importance is the most controversial element of Gadamer's work, but, in a time of difference, his comments take on immense pragmatic currency and are central to any commitment to learning. Differences between and among images permit us to engage textured readings of complex issues. For Gadamer, the first step toward dialogue is admission of bias. The second step is to respect the bias of the Other. The third step is a willingness to permit the "fusion of horizons," the interplay of two differing images, to shape a given direction. The final step is a reminder similar to that offered by Buber—meeting the Other can affect one's worldview, for good or ill. The ultimate dialogic outcome is not some pristine end state that brings contrasting perspectives together. The final answer is yet another emergent bias shared between persons. In short, dialogue begins, ends, and begins again with bias in Gadamer's world.

Tanisha, a second-year student, and her Spanish professor are having a discussion about grades. Tanisha has a B average and is striving for an A. Her professor insists that grades are less important than learning the language. Tanisha explains that keeping her scholarship rests on her grades. Her professor argues that the lifelong benefit of studying the language should be a primary concern and that many businesses seek to hire persons who speak more than one language. Through their discussion, each begins to see the issue in new ways. The professor decides to permit all students to elect to complete additional assignments to augment their grades. Tanisha understands that this additional involvement will increase her own commitment to learning the language, which will benefit her in the marketplace. What all finally agree is that language learning is important in an age of

diversity. The student and the professor begin with different biases and, in this case, find a bias agreeable to both. Such is not always the case; dialogue of biases does not always result in agreement. The link between bias and difference finds even more emphasis in the dialogic commitments of Paulo Freire and his commitment to literacy and the oppressed. Freire connects face saving and learning as vital elements of dialogue.

Paulo Freire

Freire (1972) contends that the invitation to dialogue is impossible between persons of unequal power. He assumes that a major common set of interests and power equity must be in place before dialogue can take place. He works at saving face for the oppressed and the disadvantaged, not of those in power who are inattentive to the needs of those without power. His position on dialogue is quite different from that of Mahatma Gandhi (Duncan, 1972), another 20th-century activist and dialogic thinker working to remove oppression from groups with little power. Gandhi engaged "enemies" through *satyagraha*, or loving resistance. Freire, on the other hand, reserved dialogue for those wanting to learn, those with similar commitments. Whoever assumes the position of telling and has enough power to be heard without listening to the Other is an unlikely candidate for dialogue. Awareness of the bias of inequities opens the door to change and beginning conversation.

Learning presupposes that we have something to learn that is "different" from our current knowledge base. Dialogue is a mechanism for such learning. Freire spent his entire professional life working with learning and difference tied to dialogue. He assumed that the oppressed, the disadvantaged, and the dismissed of society could and would learn through dialogue, meeting difference responsively. Freire understood that those on the outside of power must engage difference, learning to read the ways and norms of a dominant culture. Such learning from difference is not new; those without power have met such a challenge in one society after another. What is new is that both those with and without power often feel like outsiders; such a reality sets our common table. In an era of difference, from a communication perspective, there is a need for a dialogic mantra—learn from difference or miss the point of the 21st century.

A dialogic communication ethic assists the Other, saving face in order to protect and promote an environment of learning. Saving face, however, is secondary to keeping the environment open to learning; sometimes, monologic clarity must open the way for others to learn.

For example, during an intensive language learning experience, a group of young men from a country with historic norms of male privilege and power worked to keep women from that country who were also enrolled in the program from learning the language, using social ridicule as their weapon, only to have another man from that same culture step forward and name their acts of bullying. Each day, another male participant stepped forward out of silence to rebuke those who had run over many. Each day, the hope of dialogue found protection from those who refused to accept the denial of opportunity to these women and employed monologue to clear the way for learning—permitting those of us on the outside to see a dialogic ethic protected by monologue at the right time and in the right proportion. The celebration of monologue is one of the ways in which we can, ironically, make the invitation of dialogue possible and decrease the danger of what Arendt (1958/1998) called the “social,” the blurring of public and private life.

Hannah Arendt

The effort to impose dialogue on settings that do not authentically call forth dialogue forces a false sense of openness and attentiveness to another, trying to make communicative structures intimate and friendly that live genuinely in the public sphere and are enriched by communicative distance. The contrast to this constructive view of distance manifested itself in a company that called employees a family and by a large organization that called itself a community, only to lay off people and unleash disenfranchised and lonely employees. Communicative health begins with an honest recognition that public places require distance and that private life or vocabulary is not for sale or misuse in the workplace.

Arendt (1958/1998) sought to preserve the natural dialectic of public and private life, with each offering a differently textured response to human life. To blend the two realms forfeits the natural dialectic between public and private. In short, feigning good will and closeness is just that—feigning. Such communicative action is the reason for cynicism, defined as unmet high expectations (Arnett & Arneson, 1999) and propelled by those interested in a “managed smile” (Arnett, 1992) rather than what Hyde (2005) refers to as genuine “acknowledgment.”

The impulse to move the private into the public accompanies the person of convention, as Arendt (1978) detailed the plight of the parvenu, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the person on the outside

who works to accommodate, doing everything asked without ever securing acceptance. The sadness of this effort, which stems from social pressures to belong, is that not all persons find affirmation or a sense of public worth from those in power. Sometimes, it seems that no matter what is done, a given group of people will not accept the outsider. Arendt's work calls us to avoid equating dialogue with belonging. If the goal is always to belong, dialogue, ironically, becomes impossible; we return to a focus upon image that upholds social space and blurs differences between public and private communicative life.

Consider Frederic, who moves to a small town. His nationality is different and his mannerisms do not reflect the standards of the people. He is an outsider. Unknowingly, he begins to take on parvenu status, trying to fit into a community that finds him odd. He begins to say "yes" to each request made of him; he becomes the most helpful person he can be. Yet when there is a party, he is not invited. No matter how much he seems to assist others, the "outsider" status seems to follow him. Frederic becomes depressed; his only goal—to be welcomed into the group—is unfulfilled. He goes home at night thinking of other ways to assist in hopes that someday he will be accepted. Arendt's advice to Frederic would be simple but unconventional—belonging cannot be the primary goal of an outsider. You cannot make others welcome you, Arendt would suggest. The only hope is to do work and projects that one considers important with or without recognition. Belonging is wonderful, but the parvenu takes belonging to an unachievable status, failing to ask two questions: Is this group even worth joining? Am I doing tasks that are worth doing with or without their approval? Parvenus begin to give away their souls for an approval that will forever rest beyond their reach. Arendt reminds us to beware of the need to belong that takes us too far too quickly into the hands of those who might be better kept at arm's length.

This chapter on dialogic ethics begins with a basic assumption. Whatever is most important in engaging another begins and ends without demand. We can demand that another do a full day's work. However, we cannot demand that another love a given job. We can demand that a person show up on time, but we cannot demand that the person's heart be in the task. Dialogue is no different. We can demand that differences be recognized, which is a monologic communicative gesture and, at times, necessary. We cannot, however, demand dialogue. We can be attentive to dialogic moments only by protecting the validity and, indeed, the sanctity of monologue and technical dialogue. Monologue and technical dialogue make dialogue possible, and, when they go unclaimed as important communicative actions and the

demand for dialogue trumps or becomes primary, the opposite happens—monologue takes center stage and dialogue walks alone behind a closed curtain. A pragmatic respect for monologue and technical dialogue makes dialogue possible and calls for dialogic coordinates wary of demand.

❖ DIALOGIC COORDINATES: WITHOUT DEMAND

What makes dialogue and dialogic ethics possible? What are the coordinates for engagement? The authors mentioned previously all point in a given direction—respect communication that is not dialogic; this respect is, paradoxically, the beginning of dialogic ethics. Otherwise, dialogue remains banished from communicative possibility due to our demands. The coordinates are five in number. First, be a learner and a listener—attend to content/ground that shapes your own discourse and that of another. When monologue and technical dialogue come your way, seek to learn. One must place respect for content over style and delivery system. Sometimes, great ideas come in packages we do not wish to encounter. Second, demand for dialogue moves us from dialogue into monologue and concern for our own image of how communication “should” be. Third, acknowledge bias; it is inevitable. To admit where one stands actually permits the possibility of change from new insight. Fourth, acknowledge that not all communicative arrangements offer the possibility for dialogue. Fifth, keep dialogue connected to content and learning, remaining ever attentive to new possibilities that emerge “between” persons. To do so keeps Arendt’s fear (1978) at arm’s length—the impulse to use a feigned dialogue to belong to groups that might be at odds with the good or goods one holds dear. Contrary to the assumption of a parvenu, belonging is not the first principle of dialogic life; being attentive to what emerges between persons is foundational. In the words of Buber, it is the emergent common center that bonds persons and brings a sense of belonging; belonging is simply a by-product that emerges outside of our control. Finally, find ways to nourish the natural dialectic of public and private communicative life, foregoing the temptation to blur them by trying to create “nice” or friendly spaces from places that require some professional distance, avoiding what Buber (1966a) called the overrunning of reality. The reality is that not every organization is a community, and few businesses honestly fit the vocabulary of family. Dialogic ethics finds nourishment from foregoing the ongoing communicative temptation of demand, even the demand that all communication take on dialogic characteristics.

Dialogic ethics eschews demand, whether for communicative style or content. It is about a call to attend to the historical moment before us, not a demand for an era or a moment only to our liking. Change begins with meeting what is present without constant lament. Can you imagine a batter in baseball demanding that a pitcher throw a particular type of pitch? Can you imagine a weather forecaster demanding that the day be sunny? These demands fall clearly into the realm of the ridiculous. However, it is possible to imagine a person who speaks no language other than English going to a country with another tongue only to demand that all speak English. It is possible to imagine your co-worker, Shavon, demanding that another think just like she does. These latter two events are certainly imaginable, but, from the perspective of dialogic ethics, they fall into the domain of inappropriate demand.

Dialogic ethics begins with one basic prescription—respect whatever is before you and take it seriously. The reality before us is all there is; we must learn from what presents itself, whether wanted or not. Jujitsu is a martial art that uses the weight of another's body as leverage in self-defense. Dialogic ethics works as a form of moral jujitsu, using the weight of the historical moment against itself by refusing to resist what is offered but, instead, embracing it. While another is lamenting a situation, a communicator who is working from a position of dialogic ethics asks, instead, "How can I meet this situation, not with demand, but with an intense desire to learn?" Such a position does not suggest agreement, just recognition of what is before us as the door to learning. From this pragmatic meeting emerge listening and learning unencumbered by demand. Demand keeps the focus of attention on what was or should be, not on what is. In dialogic ethics, the move to intense attentiveness to the historical moment before us permits new possibilities to emerge. Dialogic ethics is not about "getting my own way," but about meeting what is before us—like it or not.

One effort at a form of dialogic ethics emerged with the term *dialogic civility* (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). A book, *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age*, and an essay titled "Dialogic Civility as Pragmatic Ethical Praxis: An Interpersonal Metaphor for the Public Domain" (Arnett, 2001) moved ethics and dialogue into public domain discussion attentive to Adam Ferguson's (1767/2004) work on the Scottish Enlightenment that introduced civility as a pragmatic counter to warring feudal clans, offering the possibility of cooperation beyond the basis of bloodline alone.

Arnett (2001) did not suggest that all communication should be dialogic or civil, but sought a safe place for engaging difference when such a place is not present. It is legitimate to question calls for civility that may mask hegemonic power structures; the work of Arendt points in this direction with her consistent warning against parvenu status.

In some settings, civility offers minimal common ground that permits diverse groups who share the goal of continuing the public conversation and maintaining civil society to engage life together. Additionally, it is possible to engage in conflict and keep civility at the forefront. Gandhi did so with his *satyagraha* campaigns based on dialogic foundations that brought Indian independence from the British. He resisted the use of *duragraha*, or stubborn persistence. Gandhi was criticized for making friends with his enemies. Martin Luther King, Jr. received similar complaints about his own method of conflict engagement. In short, the concerns about civility are both real and hardly new. One has to decide on which side of this argument one intends generally to land; in this book about communication ethics literacy, we selected the company of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. with the tempered reality brought to us through the insight of Arendt. Such a considered and tempered view of civility resonates with that of Harlan Cleveland (2006), who argues for respect for differences around a common center.

Dialogic civility engages a form of communication architecture that attempts to design a place of communicative safety, not for all time, but for a moment, a temporal moment in which difference can meet with the project of learning, temporarily bracketing a triad of domination that seeks to defame, discount, and dissect the Other. Such a project seems unduly ideal, requiring of us more than we are commonly able to supply. Yet we do supply such places—safe houses for victims of domestic abuse; halfway houses for those working their way back to everyday employment; shelters of hospitality offering meals, without question, for transients—any organization, any school, any home that offers sanctuary for another is such a place.

Dialogic civility was an effort to frame a public “communication ethics architecture” for a communicative sanctuary. Those with great confidence in their own insights are unlikely to want or need a place of safety, but those on the outside, those without, those who cannot make or break a communicative moment, need places of sanctuary, places to think and places to work with ideas and to exchange them with others. Dialogic civility is, in musical terms, a form of “rubato,” in which one takes the notes out of their normal rhythmical flow. Rubato gives one a sense of pause or elongated time. Dialogic civility was an effort to offer a sense of rubato in daily life. A sanctuary is, indeed, a place of musical prolongation for those seeking reprieve from situations and persons who seek to defame, discount, and dissect. For a moment, we step out of a time signature of social competition into a place that is different, a

form of sanctuary, a place where persons of difference can meet without threat to their dignity as persons.

The limits of the term *dialogic civility* begin with the term *civility*, which comes with a conventional expectation of conformity to a social structure. The task of this work is to reveal how dialogic ethics works in both civil and uncivil environments, with the first ethical mandate to meet what is before us, whether we approve or not, and with the second to respect the necessity of monologue and technical dialogue. Dialogue begins with meeting difference, and difference often meets us with a jarring that generates a typical expression of discontent—"If only this situation was something other than it is." In dialogic ethics, the response is pragmatic and curt: If we want to change the situation, we must first meet this radical form of otherness of which we may not approve and that we may not want. Change in contentious moments can happen, sometimes with a minimal dialogic gesture—I cannot make you like me, but I will remain in this seat. Rosa Parks's voice was powerful not just because it signaled a new future, but because she transformed a nation. As she remained seated, the world began to shake with vibrations from an ethical echo that united the past, the present, and a future to be (Arnett, 2006b). From a perspective of dialogic ethics, such change begins with recognition and learning of that which is before us, both the desired and the unwanted.

❖ A DIALOGIC LEARNING MODEL OF COMMUNICATION ETHICS

A dialogic model of communication ethics begins with four questions. First, what does it mean to "show up"? Dialogic ethics assumes the necessity of countering unreflective concern fueled by absence and lack of interest. Reflection is the first step in attentiveness, which serves as a rhetorical interruption announcing repeatedly that "our" or "my" narrative ground does not have equal support from many others. We live with a constant reminder that we do not all share the same narrative ground. Second, what is the communication ethics position from which I work, and how does it inform my interaction? This question highlights the call to reconnect word and deed, saying and doing consistent with my ground or narrative that offers ethical guidance. Third, how can I offer the Other opportunity to articulate the position or ground that shapes a communication ethic? Learning hinges upon this

pragmatic gesture toward the Other. Fourth, how can communication ethics work as a learning model based upon self-reflective accountability? Communication ethics requires recognition of the importance of attending to the Other. The Other, I, the content, and the historical moment matter, each pointing to the importance of learning.

Dialogic ethics stresses the situatedness of ethical communicative interaction between persons. In ethical communication, we recognize that persons, narrative ground, and the historical situation shape, guide, and restrain our actions. We seek insight into the potential effects of our communication and how those effects themselves find meaning, judged by standpoint, situated in and on narrative ground, informed by the moment before us, and responsive to the Other's position.

Taking communication ethics into a dialogic perspective requires meeting and understanding various communication contexts and applications. We offer the following guidelines as the first step to communication ethics literacy. Dialogic ethics demands learning that makes ongoing efforts at communication ethics literacy possible.

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.
2. Attentiveness: What are the coordinating grounds upon which stand the self, the Other, and the historical moment?
 - a. The ground of self: the ethical/narrative commitments that guide us.
 - b. The ground of Other: the ethical/narrative commitments that guide the Other.
 - c. The ground of the historical moment: the question announced by a given moment. For instance, World War II announced the question, "How do we protect democracy?" Today, the question is, "How do we meet and defend against terrorism?" There is much disagreement on the answer to the question, but there is agreement that this moment has a common question with recognition that not one answer, but multiple answers, emerge as the response. We should expect no less in a moment of contending narrative and virtue structures.
3. Dialogic negotiation: What temporal communicative ethics answers emerge between persons, pointing to communicative options for action, belief, and understanding?

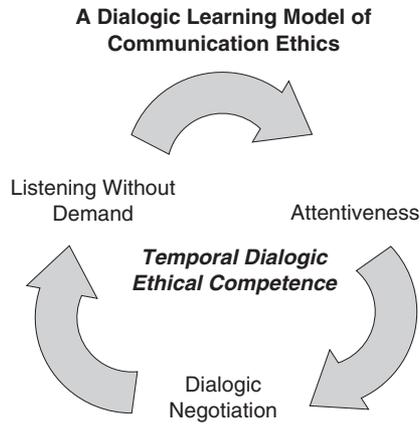
4. Temporal dialogic ethical competence: What worked, and what changes might now assist?
 - a. Evaluation/self-reflection: reflection upon one's own ethical/narrative commitments.
 - b. From knowledge to learning: The key is not to tell, but to learn from the Other, the historical moment, and reflective understanding of communicative action.

Dialogic ethics *listens* to what is before one, *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.

Dialogic ethics embraces learning and considers the impulse to tell without understanding the Other a counteraction to the kind of ethical engagement needed in a world of acknowledged difference. In the edited volume *Moral Engagement in Public Life: Theorists for Contemporary Ethics* (Bracci & Christians, 2002), Arnett (2002) cites Freire (1972), who reminds us of such a commitment:

To criticize arrogance, the authoritarianism of intellectuals of Left or Right, who are both basically reactionary in an identical way—who judge themselves the proprietors of knowledge, the behavior of university people who claim to be able to "conscientize" rural and urban workers without having to be "conscientized" by them as well; to criticize an undisguisable air of messianism, at bottom naïve, on the part of intellectuals who, in the name of the liberation of the working classes, impose or seek to impose the "superiority" of the academic knowledge on the "rude masses"—this I have always done. (p. 165)

A dialogic ethic begins with understanding our own ground and our own understanding of the good. It is accompanied by a desire to learn from the Other through engagement of difference. Next, one attends to what emerges in the meeting within a given historical moment (see Figure 5.1). The emergent responds to dialogue as an invitation, not as a demand, and is open to learning. The works of Buber, Gadamer, Freire, and Arendt urge us to meet what is before us, to learn from difference, to be attentive to difference, and to eschew the impulse for demand, even the demand for dialogue itself. As in much of what we do, increased literacy depends upon our commitment to learning what we do not know—dialogic ethics lives within this postmodern "common sense" of learning that must trump the impulse to tell in this historical moment.

Figure 5.1

❖ COMMUNICATION ETHICS: REFLECTION AND ACTION

1. Consider the model of dialogic ethics presented in this chapter. Write a story focused on conversational engagement between two persons that describes this model in action, identifying the elements of the model and each stage of the model throughout the conversation between the two persons.
2. Identify a person who holds a position different from yours on an issue to which you are strongly committed. In class or in another location, plan a meeting in which the goal of each person is to learn about and then articulate the other person's position. After this conversation, assess the interaction using the elements of the model of dialogic ethics.

❖ ENGAGING COMMUNICATION ETHICS
THROUGH LITERATURE: *LES MISÉRABLES*

At the beginning of *Les Misérables*, Bishop Bienvenu visits a dying revolutionary. The bishop was a staunch opponent of the French Revolution. The dying man explains his own position on the Revolution, providing evidence and arguments for the bishop to

consider. The bishop, in turn, presents his position. At the end of the conversation, the bishop reconsiders his original views and asks the man for his blessing. The bishop was open to learning from a man who represented a position the bishop opposed. Through the presentation of alternative viewpoints, new insight and learning emerged. Without abandoning his commitment to the faith, the bishop found a new understanding for some of the goals of the French Revolution.

When the bishop first encounters Jean Valjean, he is aware of the different background narrative that Valjean embraced, fully aware of the possibility of personal harm and loss. Nevertheless, the bishop invited dialogue, a meeting with the Other, without demand, permitting events to emerge without an attempt to control what happened by protecting his property or his person. When Valjean was apprehended and brought back by the police, a dialogic possibility emerged once again through invitation by the gift of the candlesticks, which the bishop insisted that he had given to Valjean, who had inadvertently left without them. The bishop invited learning with a hope that the gift of candlesticks might carry a life-changing sense of light. In the demands of that time, we witness the learning of a bishop and a convict and the triumph of an emerging communication ethic attentive to the Other, both of which would otherwise have been eclipsed by a telling that is inattentive to difference.

