

Learning as First Principle: The “Between” of Dialogue and Communication Ethics

In a time of narrative and virtue contention, the result of the deconstruction of the Enlightenment project, the question arises: “How can one discern the ethical communicative response?” This essay assumes that there is no one communication ethic in this moment of difference. Linking dialogue and ethics is a pragmatic postmodern gesture in an era of recognized difference that shifts communication from telling to learning, the revelatory home of dialogue. Dialogic ethics privileges learning as the first principle of communication theory in a time no longer assured of normative ethics situated within an Enlightenment hope of universal rationality.

The interplay between dialogue and ethics is the communication theory site for the meeting of difference. A dialogic perspective moves communication ethics from a prescriptive telling model to a learning/understanding engagement of the Other. Learning as first principle embraces diversity and difference in this postmodern era, guiding recognition that there is no “one” communication ethic and defining communication ethics as the “between” of philosophy of communication and applied communication. The following dialogic communication ethics model focuses on the interplay of listening, attentiveness, dialogic negotiation, and temporal dialogic ethical competence within the dialogic tradition of Gadamer (1982), Buber (1958), and Freire (2000) and the storied action framework of Arendt (1998). This essay offers insight into the importance of a dialogic communication ethics situated within a philosophical and pragmatic first principle, learning.