

## Communication Administration as a Tri-Voiced Sustainable Community

Ronald C. Arnett<sup>1</sup>

*Books and authors have challenged the focus on “me” alone, rejecting “individualism” that seeks to stand above social context and constraints (Tocqueville, 1955; Arnett, 2019; Arnett, 2020), “narcissism” that falls in love with one’s own image (Lasch, 1985), and “emotivism” that limits decision making to personal preferences (MacIntyre, 1984). Contrary to a focus on an individual abstracted from a social context, one finds an emphasis on community (Arnett, 1986). When, however, a conception of community embraces only those empirically present, it becomes an abstraction oblivious of the phenomenological considerations of persons before and after the present moment. This essay textures the notion of community with an emphasis on sustainability as a background for communication administration decision-making. A sustainable community finds definition through the following practices: 1) walking between the extremes of the openness of relativism and the closure of ideology; 2) acknowledging locality as a love of place respectful of other localities, unlike provinciality, which dismisses the importance of another’s sense of home; and 3) attending to tri-voiced contributions inclusive of those who came before us, those “not yet” here, and those immediately present. Listening to these three voices permits one to do communication administration guided by a vision of sustainable community.*

*Keywords: communication administration, sustainable community, individualism, tri-voiced community*

It is difficult to envision how the world will evaluate the leadership within higher education during an era defined by a pandemic, limited resources, and manic change. However, without dispute, our current decisions will unfold an identity apparent to future generations. Perhaps this moment in higher education is an enactment of Robert Frost’s (1992/2001) famous poem, “The Road Not Taken.” Within individual lives and institutions there are clear moments of choice between and among paths with the one followed making all the difference. The path that institutions of higher education follow will shape the intellectual, social, and moral terrain of higher education for the remainder of this century (Marcus, 2017).

This essay outlines the coordinates and the importance of a tri-voiced sustainable community, which moves decision-making from an empirical “me” to “us” inclusive of the before, the “not yet,” and the now, through the following sections. “Limited Resources: A Rhetorical Interruption” announces the challenges for higher education in this historical moment. “Ethical Warnings and Hope for this Hour” stresses the danger of individualism and the importance of a tri-voiced understanding of community for communication administration decision-making. “Existential Trust: Ground Under Our Feet” outlines a sustainable community, emphasizing narrative and the multi-voiced nature of sustainability, through an analysis of three works tied to Buber: Maurice Friedman’s *Touchstones of Reality: Existential Trust and the Community of Peace* (1972), Ronald C. Arnett’s *Communication and Community: Implications of Martin Buber’s Dialogue* (1986), and Buber’s *Paths in Utopia* (1949/1996). Finally, “Implications for Communication Administration” reinforces a basic existential fact: communication administration decision-making touches and shapes the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Duquesne University

Following the insights of three works devoted to community, this essay outlines some of the coordinates of a sustainable community. Such a view of community does not permit the present to dominate or bully the conversation. A “sustainable community” consists of three voices: past, future, and present constituents. The ethical responsibility of a tri-voiced sustainable community necessitates listening to and learning from three co-present constituents and standpoints. This essay frames the obligation of communication administration in an era of limited resources, fragmentation, and pressing immediate problems as necessitating attentive response to past, future, and present demands.

### **Limited Resources: A Rhetorical Interruption**

The choices made by communication administrators will become paradigms that situate standpoint, vision, and outcomes. This essay does not purport how to make the right decisions but how to counter a neo-liberal obsession fueled by individualism. Sustainable communities do not prosper on numbers and arithmetic about the distribution of resources alone. Sustainable communities are more akin to the field of mathematics, attending to multi-voiced coordinates and complex theorems.<sup>1</sup> A sustainable community embraces a mathematical hope that one might discover textured answers beyond the reach of mere addition and subtraction.

Communication administration in an era of abundance relies on a willingness to say yes repeatedly. In such moments, one learns little about the identity and mission of a university. The heart, the good, that an institution seeks to protect and promote (Arnett et al., 2018) emerges publicly in eras of limited resources. Declining birth rates (Kearney & Levine, 2021) and the pandemic have placed a number of institutions in financial peril as they lose revenue from students no longer living on campus (Nadworny, 2020). The future direction of higher education depends on the manner in which the reality of declining resources is met.

Such moments of crisis display identity and mission. Clarity about what a person or an institution actually stands for emerges more from response than from the immediate circumstances alone. The heart of a person or an institution finds identity in the stand, reaction, and response to events beyond our control (Frankl, 1946/1984). The question for numerous higher education administrations across this country is no longer “who we are” but “what we will be,” with an understanding of sustainable community augmenting the voices of decision-making, inclusive of past, future, and present members. Limited resources require a comprehensive view of identity, guided by the before, the later, and the now.

The theme of limited resources and polarized communication is not new; one finds this theme during war-time rationing, economic depressions, and disruptions to normality announced by pandemics.<sup>2</sup> This essay underscores an existential fact: identity and mission gather meaning in times of challenge. In an era of challenge, one must imagine future possibilities. Immanuel Kant (1790/1914) stressed that imagination pushes off something real, with higher education pushing of individual missions that represent historical and future objectives of a sustainable community. The mission and identity of a sustainable community includes past, future, and current members of a given place. In order to underscore this conception of community, this essay revisits historical works on dialogically constituted communities. Dialogue between and among the three voices within a sustainable community (persons before, not yet, and now) compose a standpoint for communication administration response to more than the immediate now. Dialogue among the three voices in a community constitutes a common center that resists a single vision imposed upon the future. Limited resources challenge communities and require them to address the unwanted. The path chosen

by a communication administration meets this reality by listening to three voices, who in dialogue work to sustain a community.

### **Ethical Warnings and Hope for this Hour**

Administrators have more than a career at stake in this era. Their decisions will shape the soul and the direction of higher education. This is a moment for leaders to choose Frost's path followed by few. This historical moment announces an ethical warning: the human community must resist increasing fragmentation propelled by individualism and find ways to augment concern for the Other, inclusive of the past and not yet in conversation with the now. This tri-voiced position contrasts with hyper-individualism, which acts in conspicuous disregard of the Other (Arnett, 2005; Bellah et al., 1985; Tocqueville, 1856/1955). The existential hope of this moment is that a sustainable community can counter the power of individualism. The contention of this essay is that a sustainable sense of community often dwells in saturated silence, just waiting to burst forth into active dialogue. Sustainable communities violate conventions of individualism and the temptation to reify the present. Sustainable communities include those before us, those not yet here, and those immediately present. The interpretive task of a sustainable community is to attend to a communicative common center (Buber, 1992) as a tri-voiced community of sustainability.

A sustainable community with a dialogic common center inclusive of multiply voices is a pragmatic call for "hope for this hour" (Buber, 1957/1990, p. 220). Communication administration in higher education has an opportunity to model how the dialogic means are ends in the making (Kant, 1785/1916). Higher education has a chance to address wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) with a vision bigger than "me" and "you" alone. Sustainable communities house the health and the welfare of the human condition, offering a tri-voiced dialogic challenge to individualism composed of immediate and short-sighted decisions. Three voices within a community invite an ongoing dialogue, disrupting the power of temporal concerns, emergencies, and crises.

A signature address delivered by Buber at Carnegie Hall in 1952 titled "Hope for This Hour" and his speech "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace," an acceptance speech for the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1953, challenged a global understanding of a sustainable community (1957/1990). Buber's address, given less than 10 years after the conclusion of the Second World War, was a pragmatic act of communal grace; he refused to equate all German citizens with the monstrous actions of the Nazis (Buber, 1957/1990). During his address, Buber reminisced about times when another needed help and he failed to respond as well as when a wrong required correction and he remained silent. Buber stated that human beings repeatedly fall short of ethically required responses. Buber stated that our common plight necessitates forgiveness, even as we do not forget. Forgiveness, without forgetting, is a pragmatic dialogic key to a sustainable community. Buber does not forget the past. He forgives in the present. Such action permitted him to imagine a future world of dialogic meeting and communal concern.

Buber lamented a lack of regard for the human community; one can only wonder what he would think of this historical moment. In light of the wars and struggles since the Second World War, the hope for this hour dwells with the notion of "the absurd" (Camus, 2012). How do human beings continue to move forward when all seems lost? How do humans muster the courage to forge onward when hope seems vanquished? Existentially, the absurd is the backdrop of a commitment to a sustainable community, defined by more than "me"

alone. Such resistance and a commitment to a sustainable community gives rise to existential trust.

### **Existential Trust: Ground Under Our Feet**

Existential trust, unlike personal trust, renders confidence in the narrative ground of community that can sustain persons. Buber (1957/1990) contended that we have lost assurance in existence: “[M]istrust is indeed basically no longer, like the old kind, a mistrust of my fellow-man. It is rather the destruction of confidence in existence in general” (p. 224). The hope for this hour resides in reclaiming trust for and within the human community. Human beings stand upon and within narrative ground that matters, composed of empirical and phenomenological senses that yield meaning and direction. One can differentiate between the empirical and the phenomenological by reflecting upon the dissimilarity between a house and a home. One can walk into a house and assess the quality of the architecture and the building materials. However, no matter how glorious the construction design, only phenomenological meaning can transform a physical structure into a home. A phenomenological sense of meaning infuses existential trust. A sustainable community composed of three voices functions as narrative ground that invites existential trust.

Existential trust from the standpoint of a sustainable community permits members to find the strength to stand upright in the midst of disappointment and toil. Existential trust announces a fundamental distinction between liking and loving, with the former generating personal trust alone and the latter nurturing narrative ground that unites persons of difference. Liking demands reciprocal personal interest while loving abides in a phenomenological space of existential trust. Unlike the reciprocal limits of personal trust, existential trust forges responsible action when liking and personal benefit are unlikely.

Existential trust acts as narrative ground under our feet, refusing to be confused with comfort. Existential trust calls forth responsibility in and for a human community, offering direction. Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated that the vilest thing one can do is destroy the narrative ground under another (Arnett, 2005; Bonhoeffer, 1981). A sustainable community renders existential trust, offering narrative ground that houses the responsibility to protect and promote a tri-voiced common center that yields direction when personal trust languishes.

Existential trust of narrative ground within community finds explication in three works, each tied to Buber: Maurice Friedman’s *Touchstones of Reality: Existential Trust and the Community of Peace* (1972), Ronald C. Arnett’s *Communication and Community: Implications of Martin Buber’s Dialogue* (1986), and Buber’s *Paths in Utopia* (1949/1996). The first two books frame Buber’s insight on community, and the last outlines Buber’s most extensive examination of community. Each work points to a sustainable community acting as an ongoing echo, which beckons us to recover a common center of narrative existential trust.

Friedman is arguably the premier interpreter of Buber’s work. His three-volume set of the personal/historical life of Buber is an extraordinary contribution (Friedman, 1983), and his dissertation, published as *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (1955/2002), is a dialogic classic. No other scholar devoted the majority of his professional career exclusively to the explication of Buber’s insights. Friedman’s (1972) *Touchstones of Reality: Existential Trust and the Community of Peace* outlines the temporal ground of existential trust. Second, Arnett’s 1986 work, *Communication and Community: Implications of Martin Buber’s Dialogue*, centers on Buber’s theme of polarized discourse in an era of limited resources. Polarized communication continues in this historical moment, functioning as a driving force within the human condition and corroding existential trust. The final work is by Buber (1949/1996) himself, *Paths in Utopia*, which

outlines the danger of constructing community with either personal trust or an imposed communal structure. Buber reminds us that the existence of constructive relations between persons is a fortunate byproduct of communal existential trust propelled by a common center of narrative ground. Something more fundamental than relational contact must gather people together. Buber points to community as a phenomenological home of responsibility that bequeaths relationships with meaning. Personal relationships do not establish an enduring sense of community; a mutual commitment must situate persons together in attentive action that protects and promotes a communal common center (Buber, 1992), which invites existential trust and social responsibility. Buber explores the evolution of free associations from utopian to artificial and manufactured relationships enacted by a centralized state. Reviewing these monographs underscores the importance of a sustainable community that invites existential trust in the doing of communication administration. The following works offer a theoretical grounding for understanding community based on coordinates other than relational connections. The contention of this essay is that doing communication administration from a sustainable community perspective requires reflection in order to counter the banality of individualism in the culture.

### ***Touchstones of Reality: Existential Trust and the Community of Peace (1972)***

Friedman's metaphor of a touchstone suggests the importance and vitality of temporal narrative ground. Dialogue among voices in a sustainable community lends insight that belies reification of a single undisputed direction. A sustainable community does not remain planted on a given touchstone of narrative ground forever; touchstones of reality change when necessary and appropriate. Friedman provides an autobiographical understanding of community under the rubric of touchstone of reality. His framework outlines three basic characteristics of what this essay describes as a sustainable community. First, such an orientation is counter to a culture of individualism. Second, community attends to Otherness, meeting and learning from difference. This conception of community is temporal and requires support from its members in order to counter a relational view of community based on consumer demand.

In Friedman's (1972) terms, "to communicate a touchstone is to witness" (p. 27) to the interplay of the past, the not yet, and the now. Touchstones of reality offer a temporal sense of narrative ground, permitting one to stand upright in a world of uncertainty. In order to illustrate touchstones of reality in action, Friedman recounts autobiographical fragments, beginning with his early years as a Second World War conscientious objector in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Friedman discusses major authors, persons of faith, great literature, and insights from theologians that shaped his three and a half years of civilian public service composed of manual labor (Friedman, 2011). Friedman's commitment to pacifism moved him to mysticism in his search for an alternative to the strident ego that drives the West.

Friedman's touchstones took him closer to Eastern philosophy; he followed a path that undercuts a Western demarcation between action and inaction, recognizing value in both. Such an orientation requires one to find direction in non-movement and faith in the face of nothingness. Taoism functions within a unity of contraries of dark and light, masculine and feminine, and receptivity and action. Such a touchstone of reality necessitates meeting the present existence on its own terms.

With an emphasis on the mystical in everyday life, Friedman discovered Buber's writings on Hasidism, specifically "The Life of the Hasidim" in *The Legend of the Baal-Shem* (Buber, 1905/1995). This religious mysticism aligned the practical and the holy, framing the

why and how of “hallowing the everyday” (Buber, 1958, p. 49). Uncertainty opens the door for an I–Thou relationship that yields revelatory insight. This pragmatic mysticism provides existential trust and narrative ground for meeting the unexpected and the unwanted. Hasidism, as a popular mystical movement in the 18th and 19th centuries, originated with the word “*asid*,” meaning pious. Members of Hasidism founded communities, each with a Rebbe as the leader of the community. Hasidism is a form of mysticism deeply attentive to communal life, marriage, and relationships of active love and devotion. Hasidism unites God, people, and community. It calls forth a response with one’s full being, with each response announcing personal uniqueness, propelling Friedman’s discussion of Hasidism and the notion of evil. “The person who succeeds in being ‘good’ by repressing the ‘evil’ urge is not serving God with all his heart, mind, and might. The ‘evil’ urge is the passion, the power which is given us to serve God” (Friedman, 1972, pp. 156–157). Existential trust, in this case, dwells within a unity of contraries, inclusive of both good and evil.

Friedman also underscored the difference between an evil image and an evil urge. For instance, on one hand, labeling oneself as evil permits such an urge to overwhelm the good; on the other hand, embracing an evil urge as part of being human permits one to find an energetic direction for the good. The demonic image dwells in lust that seeks to overrun reality and existence, seeking to possess, not meet, the Other. As Abraham Heschel warned, living within community and enacting responsibility for others is quite different than living for belonging and using the community for one’s own benefit (Friedman, 1972). Meeting others requires a genuine fervor to care for, not use, others.

Friedman shifts from the touchstone of Judaism to that of Jesus with the connecting link of Rebbe. The touchstone of reality of the kingdom of heaven rests within and among people. Friedman describes Jesus as a bearer of a covenant that unites the Old and New Testaments, using once again the image of a unity of contraries: God as imageless and God as particular. This touchstone made Friedman repudiate any Christian assertion that Jesus is the exclusive way to the kingdom of heaven. Friedman’s (1972) rejection of singular conviction propelled his aversion to a “community of affinity” based on likeness, which refuses to meet and encounter otherness (p. 211). In contrast, a “community of otherness” (Friedman, 1972, p. 213) requires meeting ideas and persons dissimilar to the self that challenge accustomed comfort. Fellowship finds definition in the confirmation of uniqueness and difference rather than in the affirmation of similarity of conviction tied to association alone.

Friedman then discusses religious symbolism and universal religion with a reminder that Jesus on the cross is more of a symbol of antisemitism to the Jews than an act of sacrifice to Christians. Religion often finds itself connected to particular and local cultures with differing conceptions of God capable of missing the universal importance of concern for the Other. Friedman asserted that when six million people died in the concentration camps, one of them was Christ himself. The universal symbol of God is that of suffering—the dwelling of God. Friedman contended that religion both points to and obscures the universal essence of God as suffering. A crisis of religious values happens when faith goes rejected or engaged in a totalistic fashion that excludes all but a limited few. The task of each generation includes discovery of touchstones of reality that undergird meaning without embracing a constricted arrogance of provincial exclusion. Touchstones of reality, existential trust, and narrative ground offer a temporal foundation for moral direction that ceases when psychologism—imposed attribution about the real meaning of another’s behavior—reigns. A life of dialogue requires meeting, not having an internal possession of truth imposed upon another. Psychologism is a self-possessed moralism that resides within the beholder, attributing

personal and subjective reasons to another's actions. Psychologism inflicts "my perspective" upon the Other, with a refusal to understand narrative ground that sustains another.

Friedman recognized the danger of psychologizing reality, where perception attends only to "my" assessment and misses the revelatory that emerges between persons and the world. The revelatory does not arise from the depths of the psyche; dialogue manifests meaning in engagement with the world and others. A life of dialogue contrasts with self-possessed internal meaning that isolates one from difference and seeks comfort within a "community of affinity" (Friedman, 1972, p. 210). Uniqueness is not in us but discovered between and among us. Difference generates Friedman's (1972) discussion of a "community of otherness," which contrasts with a "community of affinity," exclusive of diverse perspectives (p. 210).

An individual situated within a community of affinity functions like an isolated monad, unresponsive to others and simultaneously demanding that the world conform to one's own expectations. In contrast to a community of affinity, Friedman stressed a covenant of peace that witnesses to the importance of narrative ground and existential trust for self and other. In a covenant of peace, one collaborates with others and with existence itself. A partnership with existence defies "individualism" by calling forth responsibility between and among persons and context (Friedman, 1972, p. 305). A partnership with existence is a covenant of peace that enhances existential trust, bypassing the normative convention of a solely "centered self" (Friedman, 1972, p. 322). Existential trust is narrative ground that witnesses within a human community of otherness.

Friedman concluded *Touchstones of Reality* in 1972; 14 years later, he wrote the foreword to *Communication and Community* (Arnett, 1986). His foreword is a scholarly reminder of the importance of community and its connection to Otherness and dialogue. Friedman's foreword underscores a major theme within the book: polarized communication, which he highlighted in *The Hidden Human Image* (1974). Community enacts demands, moving one from the psychologizing of internal life to the meeting of persons and existence itself, working to sustain and enhance existential trust. Friedman's contribution to a sustainable community is a reminder that whatever gathers and supports a community is temporal, cautioning against blind allegiance.

### ***Communication and Community: Implications of Martin Buber's Dialogue (1986)***

This volume calls into question the notion of optimism, with a discussion of limited resources and polarized communication that disregard a narrow-ridge concern for self and other. *Communication and Community* begins with a chapter on communicative crisis that underscores a critique of looking out for "number one" defined by "me" and unresponsive to the underprivileged, the needy, family, friends, and institutions. Attending only to the self as "number one" propels strategic communication with limited concern for context and others. In an environment of increasingly polarized communication and strategic thought, ideological camps continue to dismiss the concerns of the opposition. As Buber (1957/1990) stated, "[E]ach side has assumed monopoly of the sunlight and has plunged its antagonist into night, and each side demands that you choose between day and night" (p. 221). Buber's (1947/2014) notion of the "narrow ridge" seeks to avoid polarized communication, walking a tightrope between commitment and doubt, and, additionally, one's own position and that of another (p. 218). When the ground under our feet no longer evokes trust, existential mistrust and polarized communication arise.

In an environment of mistrust of the narrative ground of another, monologue becomes a natural avenue of protection; one seeks comfort in one's own voice, direction, and self-benefit. Aggregates constituted by a collection of monologues become temporal dwellings only if one can turn the group to one's own advantage. The "meism" of singularity of conviction morphs into a collection of individuals forming an aggregate. Such action misses the corrective call of authentic guilt, which reconnects behavior to the guidance of narrative ground. If "my" concern is for me only then narrative ground cannot unite persons through a call of accountability and responsibility for the Other. An ethical community invites self-critical engagement that propels responsibility of action, finding focus in the engagement of a unity-of-contraries conception of freedom: Buber suggested that as one thrusts one's right hand into the air with a gesture of freedom, one must immediately grasp one's right hand with the left, restraining it from acts of individual excess (Arnett, 1986; Buber, 1966). Restrained freedom propels conviction co-present with trembling and doubt. Caution linked with assurance of direction is a unity of contraries that embraces an existential fact: total certainty is a delusional fiction.

Dialogic meaning within a community avoids the impulse of blind faith, which shapes propaganda's adoration of a singular truth. Meaning emerges in tempered surges of a unity of contraries of power and love, with each restraining the other. A unity of contraries makes a confident leader also a self-critic. A concern for others and a willingness to rub shoulders with difference keeps a community from teetering into an abyss of self-righteous assurance. A dialogic community is a pragmatic reminder of the danger of becoming solely concerned about one's own power and position; ultimately, a community eschews rigidity and through *hesed* invites responsible action that is essential without demand. Community is too essential to impose blindly.

*Communication and Community* adds to Friedman's conception. The work offers three additional coordinates for a sustainable community. First, invitation, not imposed demand, shapes such a community. Second, a common center lessens the dangers of fragmentation from a model of relational liking alone. Third, the dark side of a common center is blind faith and self-righteous imposition of given position, requiring a counter to monologic imposition upon others. *Communication and Community's* contribution to a sustainable community embraces a unity of contraries of conviction and self-questioning, a central theme in Buber's classic work on community.

### ***Paths in Utopia (1949/1996)***

*Paths in Utopia* is arguably the most important work from Buber on community. The back of the volume has a quote from the *New Republic* that commends Buber for exposing "the ease with which sensitive but not overinformed men espouse simple patterns based on the historical truths which they alone can see" (1996). The quote is powerful in that it announces the danger of associating community with either imposition or reliance on relational connections as a substitute for a common center of a community. Buber begins his analysis with an examination of utopian communities that give way to bureaucratic imposition. He asserted that public imposition of a communal system ultimately fails. Buber's (1996) contention with Marx and Engels centers on an anti-utopian commitment to centralization of authority, with *The Communist Manifesto* challenging the notion of utopianism (p. 2).

Marx sought a scientific foundation, asserting that Proudhon's "best world" was a utopian failure unable to stop the march of industrial development (Buber, 1996, p. 5). Buber contended that Marx's argument framed polarized communication, stressing a battle between

science and utopianism, with the latter being delusion. To be a utopian was to be out of step with material, scientific, and economic conditions. Utopianism was “prehistoric” (Buber, 1996, p. 6); from this perspective, utopians were forerunners and then obstructionists, unable to recognize the material conditions of socialism. Buber (1996) countered with an argument: “[I]f socialism is to emerge from the blind alley to which it has strayed, among other things the catchword ‘utopian’ must be cracked open and examined for its true content” (p. 6). Buber explored the utopian element in socialism stressing a vision of revelatory social change. He asserted that voluntary socialism is utopian; the term “utopian” propelled the French revolution with use of Old Testament prophetic statements. Utopianism is pre-historic and pre-revolutionary in comparison to Marxism’s inevitability of material and post-revolutionary conditions that supposedly lead to the withering away of the state. Buber wanted to recover the power and importance of utopian engagement.

Buber stated that in spite of all opposition from Marxism to the notion of utopianism, one cannot separate Marxism from utopianism. Utopians seek to understand the structure of human society united with economic change and social evolution/revolution. Buber (1996) stated, “Victor Hugo called utopia ‘the truth of to-morrow’” (p. 14). A utopian socialism restructures the material conditions within a framework of “communal autonomy” (p. 15). Out of the recalcitrant material conditions before us, utopians work to fashion a new sense of community.

Buber specified that utopians seek to provide constructive and organic ways to restructure society. In the history of utopian socialism, for Buber (1996), there are three pairs of significant thinkers who articulated this perspective in performative action: (1) Henri de Saint-Simon and Joseph Fourier, (2) Robert Owen and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and (3) Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin and Gustav Landauer (p. 16). Buber indicated two primary ways to identify these thinkers. He first categorized them in three groups and then two: the first tied to historical timeline and the second within a divide between Moscow and Jerusalem.

Buber’s second classification, which unites utopian thinkers around the metaphors of Jerusalem and Moscow, is central to this essay. The initial group consists of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen. The second group is composed of Proudhon, Kropotkin, and Landauer (p. 1; p. 2; p. 16). Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen are “the forerunners” to socialist thought (p. 16). The common thread running through the forerunners’ work is the connection of socialism with free association. The second group of Proudhon, Kropotkin, and Landauer offers a transition from socialism as a free association to an increasing sense of structure, Marx and Engel’s view of synthetic associations controlled by a strong central government.

The majority of *Paths in Utopia* assumes the division of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen as forerunners emphasizing material and social mutuality among small-scale associations, with Proudhon, Kropotkin, and Landauer announcing synthetic theories of how to restructure society. At the end of *Paths in Utopia*, Buber situates this division as a philosophical chasm, with Jerusalem representing free association and Moscow suggesting imposed synthetic associations. Buber underscored the importance of local forms of association and the limits of structured and imposed community commitments. He explicates the theme of existential trust dependent upon free association.

### ***Utopia: Local Associations***

Buber recounted that Saint-Simon was born 12 years before Fourier and died 12 years prior to Fourier’s death. They were part of a generation born before the French Revolution in 1789 and gone by the next French Revolution of 1848, which led to the creation of the French

Second Republic (Rapport, 2009). Buber contended that Fourier belonged by nature to the 18th century, while Saint-Simon, though older, belonged to the 19th. In *Paths in Utopia*, Buber (1949/1996) describes differences in their “nature” and “outlook” (pp. 16–17). Saint-Simon encouraged workers to make entrepreneurs their leaders, with the intent of welding together active members of capitalism with the proletariat. From Buber’s perspective, this was an almost prophetic vision of what was to come in the 19th and 20th centuries, “a future order in which no leadership is required other than that provided by the social functions themselves” (p. 17). The environment was one of “extreme disorder,” with the government operating in an “essentially feudal” fashion (p. 18). People divided into two classes: “the exploiters and the exploited” (p. 18). Saint-Simon conceptualized these new social relationships as “industrial associations” (p. 18). Buber argued that although “Saint-Simon divined the significance of the small social unit for the rebuilding of society” without recognizing its ultimate value, Fourier opposed the idea of engineered relationships (p. 18). He was a critic of the legacy of the French Revolution, “which had contested the right of association and prohibited trades-unions” (p. 19). Fourier was an outspoken advocate of free and voluntary associations that hearkened back to a pre-industrialized society. His position stood in contrast to Saint-Simon’s view of socially engineered relationships created by a government.

Saint-Simon, considered the founder of sociology, dreamed of a world with minimal government, propelled by production in which proletariat workers and entrepreneurs united to rebuild a society with a union of interests. It was Fourier who discussed free and voluntary associations as part of a divine social order in accordance with God’s will. He believed that social structures of his day prohibited people from living in accordance with their God-given passions. He claimed that “passional attraction” was the driving force of social life, shaped through new economic and social “associations” (Guarneri, 2018). Fourier wanted universal harmony and encouraged consumer cooperatives. Owen then offered a response to both the work of Saint-Simon and Fourier, as he pressed for a genuine community in which there is only common ownership and a collective commitment to create and conserve. Buber (1949/1996) stated:

The line of development [of socialism’s founders] leading from Saint-Simon to Fourier and Owen rests on no sequence in time. . . Saint-Simon lays down that society should progress from the dual to the unitary. . . To this Fourier and Owen reply that this is only possible [with] smaller communities aiming at a large measure of self-sufficiency. [O]nly a just ordering of the individual units can establish a just ordering in the totality. This is the foundation of socialism. (p. 23)

The uniting theme of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen was association, with increasing movement away from voluntary community to acts of imposition and mandate.

Proudhon followed with a continuing stress on association. His thought relied upon a unity of contraries, opposing individualism and, at the same time, the state. Proudhon wanted to unite the individual naturally into groups. Buber (1949/1996) argued, “It is obvious that Proudhon’s basic thought is not individualistic. Proudhon rejects a State that precludes individual and organic connections with groups of voluntary association” (p. 28). Proudhon disallowed atomization of the human being and contended that genuine universal suffrage requires organizing group life. He outlined the vitality of mutual reciprocity and free association. The individual with others advances social reconstruction structurally and economically. Proudhon encouraged moderately autonomous small groups to unite within a

federation. The goal was to connect as a federation without merging into a central authority, maintaining an oxymoron of decentralized centralization. Proudhon deplored compulsion and uniformity when applied with undue rigor; he feared imposition from distant authorities. The key was to restructure society without relying upon increasing centralization, which clashed with the socialist aspiration.

### ***Revolution and Imposition: The Limits of Optimism***

Landauer, on the other hand, pushed for a resistive form of community, in opposition to the state. The state requires challenge from another set of relationships, which Landauer called “people” (Buber, 1949/1996, p. 46). Socialism is possible, only if the people will its possibility. The renewing of society comes from a form of community. For instance, Landauer did not want to abolish marriage. He stated, “We need form, not formlessness. We need tradition” (Buber, 1949/1996, p. 48). A legitimate communal future commences with the present, not an abstract future. To be a socialist is to understand that one must supplant the un-communal. Landauer contended that a political revolution must generate a social revolution between and among persons. Shared property nourishes a “true spirit of community” (Buber, 1949/1996, p. 53). There needs to be a living spirit in revolution that bonds and unites persons. Socialism is not a dream or abstraction but rather a commitment to a community composed of a common spirit that reconstitutes the social order, without falling into the abyss of absolute order, imposed conviction, and enforced demand.

Buber stated that the common spirit of free association suffered from ongoing waves of individualism and optimism within utopian socialist action. There was cooperative movement involving numerous people from England and France from 1830 to 1848. This association was a romantic movement tied to unreality and dreaminess. That cooperative movement sought to alter social reality. People who engaged in these movements suffered the criticism of having too high of an estimation of the human being and too low an understanding of the context and historical events. They constructed an ideal human being, losing sight of organically constructed forms of cooperation through consumer cooperatives, producer cooperatives, and full cooperatives, which combine both production and consumption.

In 1827, the first modern consumer cooperatives emerged, followed in 1848 by a second wave of consumer cooperatives. Buber (1949/1996) stated that by 1830 there were as many as 300 cooperative societies, with many of them failing due to a “spirit of selfishness” (p. 61). The consumer cooperative invited quick organization. The producer cooperative took more time in the selection of buildings and wares. Cooperative settlements that combined both consumer and producer concerns took considerably more negotiating time. The cooperatives addressed the material interests of the people but too often failed to understand the actual lives of people within the cooperatives. What eventually emerged, in an effort to be profitable, was an increasing reliance on capitalist principles. With consumer or producer cooperatives, there was a reciprocity between persons and the environment. On the other hand, full cooperatives of consumers and producers found themselves often distanced from the reality of local life and problems. Increasingly mired in capitalistic actions, the full cooperative became ideologically extreme, defined by a dogmatic disconnection between locality and the aims of a cooperative effort. Settlements folded from both rigidity of dogma and minimal organic linkage between and among persons in a community. As society fell into increasing specialization, the cooperatives became more technical, managerial, and capitalistic in structural and psychological design.

Ideally, full cooperatives needed connection to local soil and real needs, something other than abstraction and imposition. Organic cooperation, not dogmatic rigidity, was the only hope if utopian socialism was to replace the state with a communal society. Utopian socialism understood that cooperative society requires small communal cells that restructure social life. On the other hand, the Marxist dialectical view of history envisioned a different and renewed social structure with a class-based revolution. Buber contended that state centralism violated a loose federation of fragmented communal arrangements. Marxism opposed a utopianism based upon optimistic assumptions of what people must do together. Cooperative societies were more sectarian and connected to the local. As socialism moved from utopia to a science of historical necessity, it left behind organic and local communal hopes and aspirations, unwanted by the Marxist movement. Marxism refused to coordinate small groups; its task was a singular one: a structural social revolution.

Marxism, as implemented by Lenin, amalgamated around a socialist idea, a colossal reconstruction propelled by historical necessity tied to the inevitable outcome of revolutionary politics. Lenin's increasing centralization lessened freedom. Revolution brought less, not more, freedom. The 1905 Russian Revolution was a wave of social and political unrest. However, it was the revolution of 1917 that overthrew the Russian monarchy. The revolution of 1905 released organs of self-administration in proletariat centers throughout the country that required unity of action. It was Lenin's doctrine of 1917 that pushed toward the abolishment of private ownership. For Lenin, power was not for the people; the party provided the direction. Councils and organs of state power made decisions; Lenin tolerated a federated reality with hopes of gathering more and more central authority. He increasingly understood cooperatives as an expression of bourgeois society. He wanted to nationalize cooperatives and mandate participation. Lenin envisioned the cooperatives moving from dreams to mechanisms of necessity. There was only provisional tolerance of decentralized cooperatives. Old Russia lasted until 1929, but by that time the mechanized bureaucratic central committee propelled all dimensions of social life. The Soviet passage from association and cooperatives to expectation and demand left behind the heart of socialism of human association.

Without such a commitment to one another, the fate of civilization rested with acts of imposition, resulting in death and agony (Buber, 1949/1996). Buber contended that many humans who live in the midst of a crisis abide by the assertion of progress, which legitimizes the imposition of a collective, curtailing individual idiosyncratic behavior. Socialism tied to communes, community, and the social-individual fell prey to increasing centralization, which devoured acts of free association. Genuine community unites collective association and a common purpose, resisting compelled centralization. Community requires an inner disposition that organically unites persons around a common center.

Buber rejected Lenin's imposition of collective ties and contrarily relied upon a collective sense of hope. The advancement of capitalism challenges community, as does compulsory collective action. For Buber, the socialist's task is to renew the vibrancy of community, rejecting individualistic and collective imposition upon others, which strikes at the heart and soul of community. The crisis of this historical moment requires communities to relationally associate without demand. Buber stated that there are two choices, two major experiments: Soviet imposition of community and small Jewish settlements of communal invitation. Village communes evolve in society where social individuals matter; differentiation arises in the midst of integration and cooperative spirit. Jewish settlements attend to locality, solidarity, individuals committed to self and other and united by a common center.

Buber pointed to a sustainable community with an emphasis on free association and the importance of reclaiming the importance of utopian thinking. Sustainable communities require an imagination and a sense of hope that one can learn from the past, the present, and the needs of the future. Buber articulates the importance of a common center in nurturing community. Buber (1923/2004) framed this point succinctly in *Between I and Thou*, stating that communities require an organic common center if they are to thrive and endure:

The true community does not arise through peoples having feelings for one another (though indeed not without it), but through first, their taking their stand in living mutual relation with a living Centre, and second, their being in living mutual relation with one another. The second has its source in the first, but is not given when the first alone is given. Living mutual relation includes feelings but does not originate with them. The community is built up out of living mutual relation, but the builder is the living effective Centre. (p. 40)

Perhaps the common center in this historical moment is a tri-voiced sustainable community.

A sustainable community requires narrative ground of existential trust. As Buber attests, the struggle is not just for community, but for voluntary association. By collective imposition and commercial gain, community goes underground into places of shattered silence. Emmanuel Levinas (1974/2013) reminded us that in every solidified “Said” there is a “Saying” waiting to emerge at the right moment. The saturated silence of community is a reified “Said” that awaits release into “Saying.” It is the voice of invitation and dialogic community that propels a touchstone for free association, a narrow ridge between individual and others, and a search for organic common centers capable of uniting persons. A sustainable community is not dead, just resting in saturated silence, waiting for a calling of genuine association. A sustainable community with an organic common center is a miracle, a wonder of the human condition and our hope for this hour. Our health, welfare, education, and professional and personal lives depend on communities bursting forth from saturated silence, giving us existential trust and a touchstone of reality that counters polarized communication—and reminding us that temporal utopias are communities that arise out of a common center and purpose within local soil. The genuine hope for community rests in free association gathered around a local common center that resists imposition, permitting the revelation of dialogue to counter bureaucratic mandate. A sustainable community is a creative background, a tri-voiced conversation in communication administration.

### **Implications for Communication Administration**

Investing in a sustainable community is not a norm in a culture that worships at the altar of individualism. A sustainable community requires putting into practice theory-informed action that counters the herd of “now” and the siren song of “meism.” Friedman, Arnett, and Buber collectively point to four elements of such a community. First, one must know the limits of both individualism and imposed communities. Second, polarized communication in an era of limited resources invokes the temptation to impose a common center composed of a monologic voice. Third, relational commitments that frame the individual self as a sovereign Self create a struggle over resources, forgetting the importance of others. Fourth, a sustainable community is only sustainable when one understands its temporal and fragile status. One cannot take such a sustainable community for granted.

Doing communication administration from the position of a sustainable community begins with theory and reading about the “why” of a tri-voiced community, not with technique alone. Engaging in communication administration from such a standpoint looks to past (both the good and problematic), future, and present voices (Levinas, 1969). There is no universal template for doing communication administration from a standpoint of sustainable community. The tri-voiced task of a sustainable community is an act of cultural resistance, countering both individualism and imposed standards with attentiveness to voices from the past, future, and present. The past requires knowledge of the history of a place. The future requires imagination about what might assist those “not yet” present. Finally, the present is the place in which all these standpoints interact in hypertextual influence (Eco, 2005). In higher education we cannot forget our history or our obligation to the future as we meet the demands of the present. Three voices nurture a sustainable community. Borrowing from and adding to Chesterton (1908), there is a democracy of the dead (p. 85) and the future that must temper decisions made within the immediacy of the now. Communication administration from a perspective of a sustainable community does not ensure success but cautions one from only doing what *can* be done rather than what *should* be done (Ellul, 1954/1964; Arnett, 2013, p. 61). A sustainable community responds to three voices—past, future, and present—each with an investment in shaping communication administration on a university campus.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Building on the work of Bakhtin, Barwell (2016) argues that “mathematical meaning emerges through locally produced, situated dialogic relations between multiple discourses, voices and languages” (p. 331).

<sup>2</sup> One disruption in higher education is a decrease in number of students living on campuses. See, for example, Lorin, J. (2020, October 15). New students at U.S. colleges drop, worsening campus crisis. *Bloomberg*. See also Korn, M. (2020, October 15). College enrollment slid this Fall, with first-year populations down 16%. *The Wall Street Journal*.

<sup>3</sup> These camps were located in Campton (New Hampshire), Coleville (California), Gatlinburg (Tennessee), and Smokemont (North Carolina) (Friedman, 2013).