

Dialogic Ethics: Leadership and the Face of the Other

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Foundational to a relational ethic is the belief that healthy human existence requires respect for others, respect that does not work to reduce their otherness to the sameness that is familiar. It is not enough that the face of another person arouses awareness. What pragmatic action does it require? This article explores the application of a Levinasian ethic on day-to-day practice in the academy. Weaving together short vignettes from daily work practice with principles of ethics from Emmanuel Levinas (1969, 1997), the author concludes with a vision of the possibility of creating a dwelling place based on dialogic ethics as a remedy to the dialogic tension between the face of the other and the needs of the organization.

Keywords: Ethics, Levinas, Face, Dialectic Tension, Other, Bakhtin, Dwelling Place, Dialogue

Ethical Imperative:

It's a modular office, a thoroughly used trailer converted to office space, parked in what once was a parking lot at the periphery of the main campus. They tell me it's temporary but it's my daily reality. It smells like the feral cats who have nested underneath and the exhaust from construction trucks. The loud clatter of trains outside fades into the background as the chatter from students, faculty and staff creates a steady, grating background of noise, laughter and talk. Not a place for reflection certainly and not how I pictured academic life. It is late in the afternoon and the physical and emotional fatigue from a long day is beginning to wrap its rough, abrasive texture around me chafing my soft inner self and leaving me irritable and cold. I want to leave and find a quiet respite filled with the freshness of fall air, but the task list reminds me of the reports that demand my full attention before the day is done. The administrative work engages my logical side and offers the satisfaction of completing works of analysis and planning that contribute to the work of the organization. In the middle of designing a spreadsheet to track enrollments, another face knocks at my open door and pleads for my time and listening ear. The work that I had hoped to get done will have to wait yet another day. I feel a call to my ethical relational self-pulling me from the task at hand and the concomitant need to answer.

Acknowledgement of the Other,¹ face-to-face, is at the heart of a relational ethic. This reflective paper explores some of the possible communicative implications of the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1969, 1997) and the resulting tensions that arise in the commonplace events and conversations that comprise day-to-day work experience in academic life. My examples stem from the starting premise that the study of communication should be evidenced in our relationships and our daily praxis. A brief

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¹ For Levinas, ethics is a first philosophy beginning with an encounter with another being different from and exterior to the self. By distinguishing that as an encounter with an Other, he emphasizes the lack of sameness that exists and will always exist between each of us. This paper uses the capitalization to indicate that concept of difference and alterity.

introduction to Levinas leads to thoughts on my personal responsibility and answerability. Creating a dialogic dwelling place is proposed as a communicative path to relational ethics.

Foundational to a relational ethic is the belief that healthy human existence requires respect for others, respect that does not work to reduce their otherness to the sameness that is familiar to me. It is not enough that the face of another person arouses my awareness and my conscience but what action does it require? In the day-to-day encounters that frame my lived experience I feel the need to respond in some meaningful way to others using the capabilities I have at my disposal. Those capabilities include the power to ignore, to dismiss with words, to wound, or to welcome the presence of the other to interrupt the personal need of the moment. That person, any person, seeking my attention is an exteriority, an “Other” outside of me and different yet present face-to-face with a voice and a need that calls me. Before I can formulate a response, the face is in front of me calling me to respond. My instinct is self-preservation and the call to a relational ethic does not account for that. “But it is precisely this inevitable centration on the ego—the fact that I am and that what ever appears, appears to me—which is put into question by the appeal of the Other” (Visker, 2003, p. 273). Only later, in the solitude of quiet space am I able to reflect on such an encounter with the Other. On the one hand I feel I am independent, self-sufficient and focused on what needs to get done. On the other hand, I am drawn to a deeper understanding of human responsibility and most urgent, my own responsibility. Reflecting on my responsibilities as self and as department chair I experience a tension between competing demands and competing desires.

Out of the face at my door sounds a voice that pierces the heart, my heart. Philosopher, ethicist, and Talmudic scholar, Emmanuel Levinas (1969, 1997), a student of Husserl and Heidegger, names this moment of ethical encounter “an epiphany.” The phrase captures the sense of wonder, awe, and awareness of the presence of the divine, or the infinite, in the encounter where we sense the otherness and *alterity* of another human face. For Levinas, the word, “face,” takes on a meaning that signifies deep humanness. It is not the customary use of the word, but a metaphor that signifies the infinite living presence of a human person. Levinas explains, “The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name face....The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure. . . . It expresses itself (1969, pp. 50-51). It is in this moment of social interaction that my own sense of “I”, my uniqueness as a self, responds. “The face of the other is a metaphor for knowing” (Arnett, 2003, p. 49). What I know is that I care. Levinas and other relational scholars contend that we are called to recognize the other and respond. The big “O” applied to the word, “other,” reminds us of the uniqueness and infinite alterity of any other human. When Levinas speaks of the Other, he frequently refers to the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. We must assume that Levinas also includes the more familiar others: the spouse, the child, the parent, the friends, the service worker, and the colleague. We presume them to be familiar but they, too, are strangers who call to us for recognition and respect. The call of the Other presents itself in the day-to-day as well as the disaster, and applying Levinas at the most basic and familiar encounter emphasizes his points. Can familiarity reduce to banality? Encounters with those we know and those we do not know both propose specific challenges to our

responsibility to respond to the face of the Other. The unknown, the ugly, the social outcast call us to recognize the inherent worth and value in an Other who is so different as to be intimidating and even frightening. Yet, the familiar faces, the ones we purport to love and support, become invisible to us in their familiarity. According to Levinas, the ethical calls us nonetheless to hear, to see, to be there for the other. The concept for Levinas is so absolute that he leaves us without even the self-serving comfort of the expectation for a reciprocal response. The implications of such a responsibility seem deep and, perhaps profound.

My needs, my wants, my dreams, and my sense of self are all called into question by Levinas's "call of the face." Levinas argues against the traditional Western view that places our own sense of "being" as primary. His argument claims that without responding to the Other, we have no self. Rather, we come into being in our response to the Other (Davis, 1996). This twentieth century ethical view arose in the historical moment of Nazi Germany and the human abuses of that system. Levinas came to believe that the philosophical focus on "being" as primary was problematic. Peperzak explains, "...Being is so intimately united with the universe of beings that it cannot be freed from its totalitarian character" (1991, p. 438). Levinas challenges us at our core belief system of self-importance. Gehrke's words encourage a reflection on the personal application of Levinas, "Only by understanding the tensions between ethics and justice in Levinas's writing and by relating those to his philosophy of communication can we understand the significance of a Levinasian communication ethic" (2010, p. 6). A reading of Levinas challenges us to reflect on relational conflict and suffering in our world today. It challenges us to be conscious of the wholeness of our saying and the specificity of our said because "...the relation between the same and the other—upon which we seem to impose such extraordinary conditions—is language" (Levinas, 1969, p. 39). Such a phenomenological view draws our attention to our lived experience and particularly our communication.

And yet, there is no specific "how to" in reading Levinas; he gives no clear plan of action or implementation. Taking my understanding of the Levinasian ethic to the experience of day-to-day relational encounters shatters the illusion that I usually act ethically or that I am even capable of doing so in every call of the Other. It is a demanding ethical command that requires my mindful response to each encounter with people. It requires giving up the desire for reciprocity. Self-preservation seems to require that I attend to only a limited number of hundreds of possible encounters and that I maintain a public mask in communicative interactions. What I realize is that at every turn, my inability to lay aside my self-focused need for space, time, privacy, recognition, power, and food (metaphorically of all kinds) confronts and humbles me. Levinas scholar, Peperzak observes:

Another comes to the fore as other if and only if his or her "appearance" breaks, pierces, destroys the horizon of my egocentric monism, i.e., when the other's invasion of my world destroys the empire in which all phenomena are, from the outset, a priori, condemned to function as moments of my universe. (1991, p. 440)

The perspective that our being is contingent on such encounters contradicts the traditional Western cultural view that the self is primary; this confounds and challenges me. I am called to consider my response.

Certainly my response will manifest itself in speech. This is not to deny my emotional and cognitive reactions to the situation in front of me. Speech, both oral and written, is essential in expressing our conscious awareness of one another. In any encounter with the face of the Other, my inner speech may, in fact, be in turmoil weighing possible utterances. The words can respect or the words can dismiss; *they have ethical power*. “One can, to be sure, conceive of language as an act, as a gesture of behavior. But then one omits the essential of language: the coinciding of the revealer and the revealed in the face...” (Levinas, 1969, p. 67).

The ethical power of speech manifests in both the saying and the said. The *said* is information given but “the said is not simply a sign or an expression of a meaning, it proclaims and establishes this as that” (Levinas, 1997, p. 35). The *saying* resonates actively from the face and the voice that announces its presence. It is a full disclosure of the face connoting an exposure to the other that is without pretense or masks. Saying embodies sincerity and transparency (Kearney, 1984). “For Levinas, however, the saying and the said, the act of expression and the thing expressed are never correlative, as noesis [thought] and noema [object of thought], since in the saying there is always the trace of alterity that goes beyond anything that can be measured in terms of its thought content” (Hand, 1989, p. 144). The saying and the said create an ethical tension in relationships. The saying might be experienced in face-to-face conversations or learning communities. The said might include reports, policies, and emails from management.

The said dictates and directs and yet, the face of the Other is present and when I am open and mindful, that presence or saying calls me. Levinas proposes that our purpose is linked to our ability to speak or to “say.” He says, “And it is for that that man is a being of truth, belonging to no other genus of being. But is the power to say in man, however strictly correlative to the said its function may be, in the service of being?” (1997, p. 37). If being is integrally linked to a meaningful feeling of connection to other humans then the saying must be felt and the said thoughtfully considered. In my professional world, the Other is present, and yet another voice calls me and demands my attention. The voice resonates from the discourse of management that permeates work in the organization, any organization. Fairclough (cited in Spicer and Bohm, 2007) defines the discourse of management as “a structured set of texts and practices which is produced, distributed and consumed by actors in a way which constructs objects and subjects in the social world” (p. 1667). It is a language of deadlines, numbers, goals, and expectations.

There is a tension between the management role and the demands of Others and exploring it may provide insight. Collinson (2005, p. 1422) avers that “taking a dialectical perspective can facilitate new ways of thinking about the complex, shifting dynamics of leadership.” I feel some dialectic tension between the said of the organization (set priorities, create processes, make decisions toward specific ends, and so forth) versus the plea of the face of the Others who have specific needs (social needs, illness, family, time, conflict, and so forth). These competing voices originate at different sites and for different ends. Like Aasland (2007), I realize that management discourse is oriented toward the perspective of what is best for the company that makes the rules. The moral system of the organization also strives for justice, fairness, and legally preserving the organization.

At the same time, organizations need employees and managers who strive for the corporate goals, complete the corporate tasks, and work smoothly together. Becoming part of the organization is totalizing for the individual, but efficient and effective for getting the organization's work done. Jackall in his 1988 book describes these cryptic principles of the moral system for managers in bureaucratic organizations

striving for success is a moral imperative; (b) rising stars serve to validate the moral system; (c) criteria for success are bounded by the system and can be based in illusion rather than in reality—success is often the result of taking credit for the good and avoiding blame for the bad; (d) self-control, and not necessarily rule-following behavior, is a moral imperative; (e) morality is determined by flexibility and adaptability to changing political realities, and not by strong convictions; (f) bad things must be covered up or reframed in order to protect the system; and (g) morality is a matter of survival and gaining advantage. (Barker, 2002, p. 1113)

Without doubt, no organizational leaders would document these principles in their code system but managers in many places acknowledge their pragmatic value in negotiating the politicized communication in management. The call of the Other is often drowned out by such a call of the organization.

Increasingly management discourse and principles define life in the academy, and the dialectic tension between the call of the Other and the responsibility to the organization intensifies. The saying and the said are in play and the organizational chart provides an example. It solidifies hierarchy and division, “a sophisticated method for establishing, conventionalizing and validating the master/slave relationship” (Barker, 2002, p. 1109). Judged like this, an organizational chart is harsh and unethical in its *saying*; however, in its *said* it serves an informational function. Like other forms of organization, the academy institutionalizes practices that result in subjugation, marginalization, and hegemony but I don't always recognize it in the day-to-day. I certainly don't want to be complicit in it but it becomes invisible in the common activities that comprise academic life. Since the organizational expectations and routines are ubiquitous it is easy to turn a blind eye to the culture of which I am a part and fail to examine and reflect on the tension between the face of the Other and the system of the organization. Organizational wisdom suggests that closing myself to the face of the Other is part of the management responsibility of being just and fair. And yet the face calls me.

Increasingly, we see organizations as systemic organisms and in some ways as an Other in their own right. That suggests that the organization, too, calls us to response. I feel that call in meeting the demands of my role as faculty member and as department chair. The existence of the organization requires my active answerability as the communicative structure that binds multiple individual Others. *The tension is felt when individual needs clash with organizational needs blurring the ethical imperative.* Baxter, an expert in the study of dialectic tension, says, “competing discourses, some more marginalized than others, jockey to emerge as the centripetal center of meaning in the process of intertextual struggle” (2007, p. 122). The struggle is sometimes between the management discourse, the voice of the Other we call the organization, and the individuals that reside in that organization. In Levinasian terms the organization is a third party and I am also in relationship to that third party. Davis explains that “I am made to realize that the Other does not exist merely for my sake, that my neighbour is also a neighbour to the third party, and indeed that to them it is I who am the third party (1996, p. 83). It is this concept that links personal responsibility to individuals to

recognition that we live life in social society. “My relationship with the other as neighbor gives meaning to my relations with all the others” (1997, p. 159).

Responsibility

The email I’m reading reminds me that the budget cuts need to be communicated to the adjunct faculty. Like other faculty, my week has been busy with exams, student issues, and meetings. But I am the chair with additional responsibilities both to the organization and to the staff and faculty. Sending the information out to the faculty I rebalance my list of work that needs to be done. I accept the responsibility of communicating the reality of the department in reports to other parts of the organization. I accept that decisions made for the good of the organization might impact individuals; sharing those decisions is a key role in management and I hope that this time it will all work smoothly. I’ll revise the schedule and send it on its way. Check it off. My performance evaluation depends on my ability to check it off on time. More importantly, my students and faculty depend on the schedule to plan their lives. It is a meaningful task. The knock sounds at the door and I look up to see a distraught colleague with a copy of my email in hand. I’m conscious of the Other looking at me and needing me. My awareness turns toward the Other in front of me.

This awareness is a crossroads and I must make choices. I know that the voice and its utterance are addressed to me. I could close myself to the need by being too busy or I could ask someone else to respond. Or, mindful of the saying that is the reservoir for the said, I could turn my complete attention to the Other and respond. I hear the voice. “Whatever my reaction, it will have a meaning that is to a certain extent beyond my control, for it will be an ethical meaning” (Visker, 2003, 274). It interrupts my interiority and my comfortable attention to my own needs.

“The word I means here I am, answering for everything and for everyone. Responsibility for the others has not been a return to oneself, but an exasperated contracting, which the limits of identity cannot retain” (Levinas, 1997, p. 114). It is not for me that I respond but for the Other. There is no guarantee that my response will be valued or correct but I feel called to answer. This is *responsibility*. When I am aware that the call is addressed to me, I can be open to the moment and its demands so that I can focus on possible trajectories or outcomes of what I say and don’t say. I hope that my utterance is caring, respectful, and, in some cases impartial and informational, but I do not always correctly anticipate the specific concerns of every addressee. In drawing a said out of my saying I sometimes fail.

Murray notes that “ethics is itself dialogical” (2000, p. 134). When my utterance fails to address the particulars of the person I’m communicating with, I must answer for my own action and my own utterance. I must answer to the Other dialogically. In a culture that privileges the individual and the self, this is a difficult concept to accept. After all, my intentions were good. We might rightfully ask, “From where does that responsibility originate?” According to Levinas, the face of the Other is the phenomenological experience which commands the self to respond. In that encounter with the face, one sees a trace of the infinite and is drawn to respond with openness and care. The face is not just skin for Levinas; *the face is beyond the skin*. “The skin caressed

is not the protection of an organism, simply the surface of an entity; it is the divergency between the visible and the invisible, quasi-transparent, thinner than that which would still justify an expression of invisible by the visible” (Levinas, 1997, p. 89-90). The skin divides between our public self and our deep inner vulnerability. *Skin signifies the face*; it lets us know that a face is present, beyond the skin, yet reflecting for us a need for response. That does not mean we always follow that demand for ethical response. That ethical response requires us to acknowledge the Other without trying to make her/him just like us. “The central difficulty for Levinas is to elaborate a philosophy of self and other in which both are preserved as independent and self-sufficient, but in some sense in relation with one another” (Davis, 1996, p. 41). Failure of understanding is to be expected if the alterity of the Other is preserved. Minimizing such alterity totalizes the Other into sameness and denies the presence of the infinite in them. “The face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp” (Levinas, 1969, p. 197).

Levinas proposes that the face is situated at a sort of borderland between infinity and totality: on the one end of the continuum there is a connection to the divine and on the other end all uniqueness is collapsed into sameness. He writes in *Otherwise than Being*, “The face of a neighbor signifies for me an unexceptionable responsibility, preceding every free consent, every pact, every contract,” (1997, p. 88). On the other hand, when we focus only on our intention without consideration for the response we are prioritizing our self over the Other. Levinas believes that by privileging the self and seeking to collapse the Other into our understanding, we harm the Other. That harm is what Levinas names as “violence to the Other”.

Levinas grounds his philosophy in challenging a Western philosophy that privileges the self and its quest for being (ontology). Ontology seeks the unity, the similarity, and oneness of the experience we humans call being. Levinas points out that to reduce the alterity of the Other through thought, action, or structure is to totalize, to destroy the separate identity of the Other. This concept of violence as Levinas defines it is broader than mere physical battle.

...[V]iolence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action. (Levinas, 1969, p. 21)

We totalize without intention. Management responsibility includes planning, organizing, directing, and controlling (Longenecker, 1985) and in carrying out those duties a manager often seeks to minimize differences, inadvertently totalizing the Other. Standardizing curriculum, implementing assessment, and scheduling are all examples of processes within the academy that seek to ensure quality and as an unintended consequence, totalize the faculty. The face of the Other is obscured and diminished.

This is the emotional and cognitive space where Levinas leaves me, leaves me to contemplate how I can understand ethical responsibility in my lived experience both as an ethical person and as a competent manager. *Responsibility is no stranger to any manager*. Levinas notes that “If we call a situation where my freedom is called in question conscience, association or the welcoming of the Other is conscience... The calling in question of oneself is all the more severe the more rigorously the self is in

control of itself” (1969, p. 100). It is time for an examination of my own conscience. My choice to study communication *ethics* presupposes my personal willingness to call my own actions into question and to risk my freedom for the sake of my desire for the Other. In some ways it may be easier to examine my conscience in encounters with those outside my self-conceived social sphere. I can quickly examine the dialogue about “those people” and be taken to task for failing my ethical responsibility. I might share my trepidation about carrying my intentions into real actions in support of the homeless, the panhandler, the bored students, or the strangers; such a discourse would illuminate my own prejudices and self-serving attitudes. But, it may be too painless.

The call to conscience becomes personalized and confronts me even more profoundly when I examine my behavior in those relationships in which I live and work. Presumably in the sphere where I know and care for the Other, I should have little problem in giving myself for their needs. Conflict ensues when my own needs, the demands of assumed roles and the needs of the Other clash. What does it look like when we lay down our own need for the need of those in our workplaces and our homes? How do we recognize our selfishness without abandoning our self? It is my failure to be always ethical at this level that haunts any reflection. Responsibility alludes to the actions we take in a situation. The specific action of “what do I say” can be called answerability.

Answerability

“What does this budget cut mean to me? Will I have a class to teach?”, the adjunct professor asks. “There will be fewer classes offered this next semester and there will be faculty who are not assigned a class,” I reply. I realize that none of us has a guarantee of employment and yet some of us have less risk than others in the system. The situation makes sense from a numbers perspective and the decision is sound organizationally if we are all parts in the creation of a product. I wonder how other chairs deal with the gut wrenching decisions that impact the lives of others. I don’t know how to soften such a blow yet...the person before me is in pain and suffering.

This sounds and looks like a call for action and not reflection. What needs to be done? What should be said? The face evokes three emotional orientations in the self (Levinas, 1997). The first is *responsibility*. Responsibility is a movement toward the Other, a willingness to care for the needs of the Other, and even a willingness to sacrifice one’s life for the life of the Other. The second emotional orientation is *guilt*. The self feels guilty for taking the place of the Other, for Being. The responsibility for the Other is contingent on the guilt evoked by the face. The face reveals to the self that she or he has not done enough to alleviate the pain of the other. A final and more significant emotional orientation evoked by the face is *suffering*. The face informs the self about the suffering of the Other. The self is compelled to respond to that suffering. The relationship between the self and the Other is asymmetrical, according to Levinas. The self does not have the right to expect the Other to reciprocate the self’s responsibility. The self must be willing to take on the Other’s suffering with no strings attached.

Levinas shares a concern for the importance of dialogue and responsibility to the other with Bakhtin. In fact, the call to communicative action may find more specific

direction in Bakhtin (1993) who proposed that we are held accountable for our actions and our dialogue calling the imperative “answerability.” Knowing what to do is a challenge; knowing what to say may be even more of a challenge. Uncertainty pulls us towards inaction and silence but there is also the possibility of creativity and transcendence. Although, we cannot physically take on another’s suffering, we can answer with comfort and acknowledgement by our openness in dialogue that respects the life and feelings of the person who calls us. There is no ready script for us. We cannot accurately predict the response and there is the moment of creativity and answerability. It is the give and take in the authentic response to what is before us. Bakhtin writes:

An answerable act or deed is precisely that act which is performed on the basis of an acknowledgment of my obligative (ought-to-be) uniqueness. It is this affirmation of my non-alibi in Being that constitutes the basis of my life being actually and competently given as well as its being actually and competently as something yet-to-be-achieved. (1993, p. 42)

In his essay *Art and Answerability*, Bakhtin (1990) outlines the role of answerability in life as well as art. Bakhtin writes:

But what guarantees the inner connection of the constituent elements of a person? Only the unity of answerability. I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art, so that everything I have experienced and understood would not remain ineffectual in my life. But answerability entails guilt, or liability to blame. It is not only mutual answerability that art and life must assume, but also mutual liability to blame. (p. 1)

Our decisions cannot be arbitrary because they are connected to experience within the social, political, and artistic worlds. Being answerable means that we are capable of justifying our decisions as a part of our own, presumably, cohesive worldview. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin (1993) provides a deeper understanding of answerability. *Utterances*, he argues, demand a response and as such, they form the basis of the ethical relationship between self and Other. I make an utterance in “anticipation of a response.” By anticipating a response, I have made myself answerable for my utterance. My utterances are a reflection of who I am and where my guilt is. Bakhtin notes, “There is no alibi in being” (p. xx) and therefore, I cannot claim to not have lived. I am responsible for my words and deeds.

Ethical relationships are formed in dialogue, a specific type of utterance. It is not the monologic script of a speech. It is not the “how to” mode of teaching someone a new skill. “Dialogue, understood as the communicative exchange of agents embedded in a particular historical moment, a particular sociocultural standpoint, and a particular set of experiences, requires us to stand on our own ground while being open to the Other’s standpoint” (Arnett, Harden-Fritz, & Bell, 2009, p. 55). Dialogic space in a work environment must be nurtured and revered; dialogue is a learned process of always being open to learning.

Contemplating A Dwelling Place Open to Dialogue

Please come in and let’s talk, I invite the colleague into my office and offer a chair and my listening ear. I close the window and the door to muffle the noise and create a space for openness. The paperwork sits idly by waiting for my attention to return. The phone rings but I ignore it as I hear the anguish, fear, and longing pour forth from the face sitting with

me. There is no problem I can readily solve and no way to salve the wound, only respect for the story being shared and the person sharing it.

Ultimately answerability is bound to individual utterances. And yet it is rarely black and white. Each call to response is situated in “the layered, textured, ongoing complexity of changes in the life world” (Arnett, Harden-Fritz, & Bell, 2009, p. 114). Judging the appropriate utterance, distance, and expression from which to respond to the alterity presenting itself in all of her/his vulnerability is a daunting challenge. Such an answerable act recognizes that ethics belong to the moment *and each individual must assume their part with no excuse for not doing what is right*. “A dialogic perspective urges scholars to interrogate discourse for its struggles” (Baxter, 2007, p. 123). Recognition of the dialectic tension is a starting point of sensitivity to voices that may be muted in the struggle. We may have only ourselves to offer in the face of institutional factors beyond our immediate control.

By accepting a management responsibility I have accepted responsibility to be fair and just in how I implement organizational initiatives and how I communicate the impact of organizational decisions. I am answerable as my own ethical self and as the voice of the third party, the organization. Although taking an assigned organizational role may be totalizing in its expectations of minimizing alterity and speaking with the voice of the organization, I have choices in how I engage with the others in my sphere of influence: temporal choices, language choices, and spatial choices. These choices emerge out of the place, the organizational or department climate, in which we stand. Is the place open and free? Does it induce fear? Does it feel hurried? Does it invite the Other to enter and talk?

The nature of the place begins with my own approach to the Other. Adopting a Levinasian ethic compels me to be mindful of each interaction and my response; each utterance and my answerability. Part of the tension between the call of the Other and the call of management discourse stems from mindfulness of my responsibility to my own understanding of ethics. Such mindfulness seeks to put ethics into action. Nielsen (1990), although he does not incorporate, proposes dialogic leadership as ethics in action,

key to ethics leadership is that in those situations where there may be a conflict or contradiction between what is ethical and what is in the material interest of individuals and/or the organization, there is at least something of a prior ethics truth intention and not singularly a value-neutral, constrained optimizations of organizational objectives. (p. 765)

Approaching leadership from a Levinasian ethic is not value neutral but prioritizes the encounter with the Other.

That encounter with the Other opens the possibility of dialogue. We cannot demand dialogue but we can make temporal, emotional, and physical space for it to emerge. According to Levinas (1969), humans live an embodied existence in physical places where we eat, enjoy, and suffer the natural elements. We construct homes and dwellings, carrying on social and economic activities in daily life. But our dwelling is more than a physical structure; *dwellings are integrally intertwined with the human experience that occurs in them*. Although Levinas argues against a need for dwelling place, his emphasis on an ethic of hospitality inherently infers a welcome into home (Eubanks & Gauthier, 2011, p. 126).

We converse with Others in technical and more dialogic discourse. Yet, it is the encounter with another person that disrupts interiority and connects us to the exterior world calling us to transcend the world in our response. Offering ourselves is an act of hospitality that creates comfort and belonging. Harrist and Richardson (2012) propose that although Western culture has made significant strides in ensuring individual rights, “it has not been as successful in developing appreciation for, among other things, the deep connections that make possible a rich understanding of and meaningful participation in community life” (p. 343).

The workplace is a community in which we can create a hospitable communicative place to provide the human need for a place in space and time, a place to share with others, a place of shelter and nourishment, a place to foster a sense of community, a place to balance lives between the tasks of jobs and true care for one another. I believe that such a place is more than a physical space, it is a *rhetorical space*. The notion of rhetorical space envisions opportunities for particular discourse and engagement with others that is created by the nature and ambiance of a physical space as well as the invitation and hospitality of the people who dwell there. There is a comfort and safety experienced in rhetorical space that encourages dialogic communication. Building such a dwelling place is not only the work of architects and carpenters but of competent communicators.

Hyde (2006) describes the competent communicator as “a linguistic architect whose symbolic constructions both create and invite others into a place where they can dwell and feel at home while thinking about and discussing the truth of some matter” (p. 86). Competent communication mitigates against the dialectic tension between the call of the Other and the call of the Organization.

Levinas says that the relation between the same and the other is accomplished as *conversation* (1969). Such a conversation can reflect the presence of the transcendent as it works to break down the totalizing impact of systems, processes, and roles. This concept of conversation reminds me of Buber (1970), who gives more guidance on speaking ethically with the other. Buber describes our options. We can respond in a way that objectifies the other, diminishing their humanity by treating the person as an “it.” Monologic, distant, and centered on the needs of the self, Buber calls this “I–it.” Effective for episodes of giving directions, sharing technical information, or ordering fast food, the “I–it” conversation can be demeaning and humiliating when used inappropriately and exclusively. When “I–it” communication is used instead of discussion or used to share bad news, it denies the face of the Other.

When the communication is sensitive, emotional, or personal we can respond in a way that respects and cares for the Other. Buber calls it, “I–Thou.” Like the thought in Levinas, the “I–Thou” calls for a complete giving of the self for the Other and this must be done through our speech and thought. The I–Thou relationship is one that recognizes the self but only in its service and availability to the Other. Letting the need to finish a report be put aside to sit and listen to a colleague share a personal issue can be “I–Thou.” Conducting department meetings that allow for everyone to share their views can be “I–thou.” Something as simple as not answering the phone when a person is sitting with you in your office is offering an “I–Thou” moment. The possibility of dialogue and the creation of a dwelling place are opened by paying attention to the opportunities to acknowledge Others that present themselves throughout a busy workday.

In their book, *The Reach of Dialogue: Confirmation, Voice and Community*, communication scholars Anderson, Cissna, and Arnett describe the basic characteristics of dialogue (1994, pp. 14-15). Dialogue requires a setting aside of the needs of self in order to apprehend the needs of the Other but is intended to respect both self and Other. Levinas might argue that it is not enough, but I believe it is a starting point as an appropriate process in an ethical response to the voice of the Other. Dialogue requires immediacy of presence, an availability to the Other here and now. Dialogue implies being flexible and open to emergent unanticipated consequences. Recognition of “strange otherness” is a dialogical imperative that is consistent with Levinas’s call to otherwise than being. The collaboration, vulnerability, and mutual implication imply a shared experience in the dialogic encounter that supports the Levinasian perspective. *Dialogue is a process and part of a temporal flow, it is grounded in history.* The final characteristic attributed to dialogue by the authors is quite reminiscent of the call to conscience and responsibility; *dialogue requires genuineness and authenticity.*

“The dialogic turn takes us to the Otherness of temporality and conviction walking side by side with doubt, vulnerability, and a willingness to learn” (Arnett, Arneson, & Bell, 2006, p. 83). Creating a dialogic dwelling place requires our thoughtfulness and willingness to learn from every encounter and every mistake. Our speech is linked to our thought and our thought links our actions with our words; this inextricably links our thoughts with our actual ethical behavior in discourse. Levinas posits that thought is necessary to move us to the otherwise than being, “Thought and interiority are the very breakup of being and the production (not the reflection) of transcendence” (1969, p. 40). Thought connects us with the Other and that connection is what draws us and where we find life’s meaning.

Meaning is found in the acknowledgement of our own humanness and the acceptance of it in others. Drawing from the work of Levinas, Hyde (2006) describes rhetorical competency. He argues that acknowledgment is a life-giving gift, and, as such, is at the heart of the ethical relationship between the self and the Other. Hyde defines acknowledgement as “a communicative behavior that grants attention to others and thereby makes room for them in our lives” (p.1). Hyde notes that we have an ontological impulse to acknowledge others at a deeper level than recognition. In other words, while we might recognize the existence of Others, that recognition does not necessarily mean that we *acknowledge* them. Acknowledgement requires a rhetorical expression of the value of individuals, a means of letting them know that they share a part of you. Similar to Levinas’s perspective on responsibility, to refuse to acknowledge Others is to deny a part of the essence of our humanity. By responding to the face of the Other we become more human.

One form of positive acknowledgment suggested by Hyde is that of “home.” It is similar to the concept of dwelling place discussed earlier. Hyde argues, “A house that is authentically a home is an abode or dwelling place whose inhabitants ought to know that, no matter how bad things become, here still exists a haven of shelter and forgiveness;” a home is “a place of genuine care and comfort” (p. 98). To invite a person into one’s home as in “Make yourself at home,” Hyde argues, is a powerful gesture of positive acknowledgment because it demonstrates to others that we are making room for them in our lives. By extending the notions of “home” to our dwelling in the workplace we extend the possibilities of hospitable communication and shelter that promotes peaceful

relationships with the other. *The difficult talk that is required when management discourse clashes with specific human need is more palatable when it emerges from an ethical relationship.* Creating a dwelling place open to dialogue may mitigate the dialectic tension that permeates the demands of professional life as we are bombarded with the Others in our sphere of influence.

Integrating Levinas into Daily Practice

No matter what activity we are engaged in, any moment of face-to-face encounter is a call to ethical response jarring us out of the comfort zone of a self for the self. The radical nature of Otherness as presented by Levinas makes us wary and uncomfortable leaving us little choice but to reconsider our position with the Other in our existence. It matters not whether the Other is attractive, deserving, or appreciative; we must meet their need(s) and respect their presence. Levinas implies a response which is material in nature: give food from our mouths to the other; die for the other; serve the other. But such material examples extend beyond the material as a metaphor. The food from our mouths also include the words given to the Other. When we put aside our own need(s), we have died to ourselves for the Other. When we serve the Other we listen and we embrace the presence of the one in front of us.

Sacred texts from the major world religions echo these commands and tell us to demonstrate our faith by demonstrating behavior that places the needs of the Other over our own selfish interests. We experience the Other through a total communication—verbal and nonverbal—experience: seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling. Serving behaviors require the spoken word, dialogue with the Other, and engagement with the other through speech in spaces that are made into hospitable dwelling places.

Dialogue is a powerful approach for being for the Other. Levinas says, “Speaking, rather than ‘letting be’ solicits the Other....speech cuts across vision” (1969, p. 195). Passing a homeless man on the street who says “hello” forces his presence into my visual perception and solicits my response. The voice of a student or a faculty member also solicits my response. The message that *communication* is our bridge to the Other is clear. Dialogue is centered as the heart of an ethical, moral, and spiritual relation with the Other. It is in such dialogue that we experience respect, acknowledgment, and care for the needs of the other. It is at this place of discourse that I believe communication scholars can illuminate a path for an ethical response.

Summary

In this article, I shared the experience of two powerful forces: being for the Organization and being for the Other. I propose the importance of building a dwelling place, a home, that integrates dialogic communication to mitigate against the totalizing effects of a bureaucratic structure. It is a start. This brief look at the practical implications of applying Levinasian ideas to life in a management role undoubtedly raises more questions than answers. However, it is at that juncture of philosophy and lived experience where ethics becomes a reality. How should we ethically address the differences in our students? What is our ethical commitment to adjunct, contingent, faculty? How can *new* academic department chairs be prepared to manage the stress of the dialectic tension in the role of chair? The face of the Other is not abstract but personal and known in the day to day and moment to moment of interpersonal encounters. The face calls, “here I am” and I am answerable.

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