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COMMUNICATION ETHICS IN SOCIAL CONFLICT:
NONVIOLENT AND CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES

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Introduction

In this dissertation, I argue for a dialogical approach to criticism and advocacy that includes careful listening and charitable interpretation even to viewpoints one considers profoundly wrong. On this approach, the critic seeks first and foremost to understand the interlocutor's views on their own terms, to take seriously the possibility that the interlocutor might have insights that are valuable and truthful, and then to point the way—working simultaneously with-and-against-the interlocutor—toward a different way of thinking and acting. This dialogical criticism is an effort to get beyond zero-sum “us versus them” frameworks and into a collaborative problem-solving framework. Arguments for dialogical criticism as a form of communication in social conflict, I contend, do not need to rest on abstract principles but can be based upon the specific goals and commitments of the participants in those conflicts.

Many books and articles exhort readers to engage in dialogue. However, there are a variety of objections and misconceptions that prevent people from engaging in transformative dialogues. Dialogue is often treated as a communicative ideal, but it is just as often deemed naïve and unrealistic. In a perfect world, it is said, we would happily recognize and affirm one another and seek to understand different perspectives. But this is the real world. There are real social problems, real ideological disagreements, and real evils that need to be resisted. Sentimental visions of everyone getting along cannot guide practical action for social change.

For many, “dialogue” has become synonymous with “compromise.” Even its proponents often treat dialogue as something tentative, skeptical, and yielding. For some, to engage in dialogue means to give up the goal of persuasion; in dialogue one seeks to understand rather than to convince. For others, dialogue involves a mutual agreement to follow certain rules of order, rules that hold you back from fighting for the truth with all the weapons at your disposal. In both

cases, dialogue is seen as antithetical to the kind of disruptive protest that challenges injustice and exposes false ideologies.

Dialogue, many believe, is the sort of communication one can only enter into: (1) when dialogue partners share common ground, (2) when there are impartial moderators and mutually agreed-upon rules of engagement, (3) when all parties agree to engage in dialogue on equal terms, and (4) when the relationship between the participants is more important than the issues that divide them. Hence, when (1) there are deep-seated disagreements over politics, ethics, or religion, (2) there is no impartial referee and at least one side continually breaks the rules of respectful discourse, (3) there is a significant power disparity or one group refuses to take the other seriously, and (4) when what is at stake is a matter of crucial importance—genuine dialogue is deemed impractical, if not impossible. Communication theorist Julia Wood writes, “Why should a CEO engage in dialogue with a line worker who wants better working conditions but cannot afford to risk her or his job?... Those who enjoy power and privilege often feel no motivation to interact dialogically with those who do not benefit from the same status and advantage. As [Chantal] Mouffe bluntly notes, ‘No amount of dialogue or moral preaching will ever convince the ruling class to give up its power.’”¹

Even further, many argue that it is dangerous to engage in dialogue with proponents of views deemed beyond the pale, because listening to these views grants them a degree of legitimacy they do not deserve. Calls for dialogue are also viewed with suspicion because “dialogue” can be a pretense for those in positions of power to silence those with dissenting views. Conservative theologian R.R. Reno writes,

¹ Julia Wood, “Foreword,” in *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, eds. Anderson, Baxter, and Cissna (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), xix–xx.

Let's be honest: Crusaders for doctor-assisted suicide and gay rights are not interested in dialogue. Secular progressives demand unconditional surrender. 'Dialogue' has become one of their many tactics for neutralizing opposition. In my years as a theology professor, as a rare conservative in higher education, I became accustomed to calls for dialogue on this or that issue. In almost every instance, it was a set-up for mandatory public capitulation. If someone regards abortion as a moral evil and same-sex marriage as an oxymoron, as I do, he cannot say so in a public forum, for it amounts to a sin against dialogue. It 'shuts down conversation,' I was told on many occasions... The movement from dialogue to censure and then denunciation is often a smooth one.²

Despite their differences, Reno and Wood express what many have come to believe:

dialogue with one's ideological opponents is a pipe dream—even when it's possible, it's at best ineffective and at worst capitulation.

Dialogue is almost universally praised, yet frequently deemed ineffective for bringing about a better world. The same could be said of respect, listening, compassion, and cooperation. People will—quite sincerely—insist that they value these, while also approving of manipulative, dismissive, dehumanizing, and antagonistic rhetoric in certain cases.³ This result is widespread hypocrisy and self-deception. People switch back and forth between ethical logics like settings on a fan, often without realizing they are doing so. In social conflicts, like the polarized political culture of the United States, each side criticizes their opponents' inconsistency while justifying their own. According to conservatives, liberals preach tolerance and compassion but will nonetheless resort to rhetoric that mocks, silences, and attributes malicious motives to conservatives. According to liberals, conservatives preach morality and righteousness but will nonetheless resort to rhetoric that misleads, debases, and stereotypes. Even if many of these

² "Against Human Rights," *First Things* (May 2016) <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/05/against-human-rights>.

³ The result is a sort of "dirty hands" approach to communication ethics. I discuss this in greater depth in chapter 2. See Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1973): 160–80; Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Reflection on the Problem of 'Dirty Hands,'" in *Torture: A Collection*, ed. Sanford Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 77–89.

accusations of hypocrisy are exaggerated, they are in some measure true; it is difficult for people to maintain a consistent communication ethic while actively participating in social conflict.

This dissertation is an attempt to respond to these objections and clear up these misconceptions about dialogue and ethics that contribute to this fragmented moral landscape. My principal goal is to reconcile the *morality* of dialogue and the *practicality* people find in criticism, confrontation, and condemnation. I argue that, for a wide range of ends, criticism that attends carefully to the voices of opponents and interlocutors and seeks to address their concerns is not only a moral option, but the most effective means of achieving lasting change. Rather than separating the moral aspect of communication from the practical aspect, I treat the two as integrally linked. Wood is representative when she contrasts “dialogic modes of action and interaction” with “strategic, rhetorical, and confrontational communication.”⁴ I argue that this dichotomy is common but misleading, and that “strategic, rhetorical, and confrontational communication” can be done in a dialogical spirit.⁵ Rather than treating dialogue and criticism as alternatives, I argue for a kind of dialogical criticism. Dialogue is not only comparable with confrontation; dialogical confrontation is well-suited to challenge the illusions that sustain and justify unjust structures of power.⁶

Reno insists that Christians pursuing dialogue with defenders of immorality represents a “compromising complicity with the present age.” He writes, “Our moment calls for witness, not

⁴ Julia Wood, “Foreword,” xxii.

⁵ The difference between dialogue proper (actual face-to-face conversations) and the dialogical spirit comes from Mikhail Bakhtin. Josina Makau and Debian L. Marty write, “Importantly, even when argumentation is developed for ‘one-way,’ rather than ostensibly dialogic, communication contexts, *a dialogic spirit is key to effective and ethical argumentation...*” *Cooperative Argumentation: A Model for Deliberative Community* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2001), 180.

⁶ I am using the words “dialogue” and “dialogical” in a different way from David Bohm and others who see dialogue as essentially non-persuasive. I discuss some of the ambiguities in this word in chapter 1.

dialogue.”⁷ I argue that this, too, is a false dichotomy, and that the shape of Christian witness is inherently dialogical. The approach I develop here is not only compatible with Christian theology, but illustrates in greater detail what it means to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15, NRSV).

Audiences

Philosophers and communication scholars have written a great deal about dialogue.⁸ I engage with their contributions in what follows, I focus primarily on addressing the questions and tensions that emerge in popular political, ethical, and religious disagreements. While I hope this dissertation adds something to scholarly debates within the philosophy of religion, communication ethics, and Christian theology, my principal aim is to address four overlapping audiences:

(1) People who want a moral framework for persuasive communication

Much has already been written about the norms governing communication in social conflicts.⁹ My goal is not to propose something radically new, but to explore in greater depth the factors of moral psychology that make it easy for people to violate their own moral rules. Only by taking seriously the limits and shortcomings of dialogue can we make an honest, persuasive

⁷ Reno, “Against Human Rights.”

⁸ Key philosophers of dialogue include Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, Paulo Freire, David Bohm, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Maurice Friedman, Ronald Arnett, Ivana Markova, Dimitri Nikulin, Josina Makau, Charles Taylor, Julia Wood, John Shotter, Jürgen Habermas, Kenneth Gergen, and Seyla Benhabib. For a helpful survey of the field, see “Texts and Contexts of Dialogue” by Rob Anderson, Leslie A. Baxter, and Kenneth N. Cissna in *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, eds. Anderson, Baxter, and Cissna (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), 1–17.

⁹ A survey of the field can be found in Ronald C. Arnett, Janie Harden Fritz, and Leeanne M. Bell, *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008). My aim is to offer a strategy for individuals and groups to cooperate, persuade, and confront within a pluralistic society. I do not address the question of what communicative norms are necessary to ground and sustain liberal democratic practice. As such, this project is only tangentially related to debates between John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, Chantal Mouffe, Amy Gutmann, Seyla Benhabib, and others on the topic of deliberative democracy.

case for dialogue. This is, then, a *dialogical argument for dialogue*. Additionally, I argue that the dominant mode of advocating for moral communication has serious limitations and needs to be augmented by another approach,¹⁰ one focused specifically on the tendency for ends to overwhelm means in social conflicts.

(2) *People who want an effective strategy for positive social change*

According to Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., the *means* one uses to effect social change must be consonant with the *ends* one hopes to achieve. As King says, “One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek but a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends by peaceful means.”¹¹ I defend a version of this principle, arguing that dialogical communication practices are more effective at bringing about positive social change because they are expressive of the vision of a better society they advocate. To use Wittgenstein’s terms, in dialogue we do not merely *say* what a more equitable community is like, but *show* it. For King, since the ultimate goal is the creation of the beloved community, the form and the content of one’s symbolic actions need to work together to convey the same message of peace and justice for all. “Love your enemies” is thus not only a biblical commandment but the foundation of a practical model for advocacy in polarized societies.

Rules of moral communication are often seen as constraints on effective activism.¹² To abide by the rules of civility is tantamount to fighting with one hand tied behind one’s back. By contrast, I argue that a communicator can reinforce their activism by making the means they use

¹⁰ See chapter 2. The approach I call integral communication criticism (see below) is not at odds with the notion of timeless moral laws, nor is it at odds with efforts to train more virtuous communicators.

¹¹ Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 1986), 627.

¹² Bruce Ackerman refers to dialogue as a kind of “conversational restraint” and argues that for the sake of maintaining a liberal social order individuals need to make an “emotional sacrifice” and refrain from asserting their moral ideals in disputes over law and policy. A key claim of this dissertation is that the idea of dialogue as *holding back* is misleading. Bruce Ackerman, “Why Dialogue?” *The Journal of Philosophy* 86, no. 1 (1989): 16, 19.

to convey their message expressive in a way that helps them accomplish their goals. Rather than holding back, dialogical communication can be even more forceful because form and content are working together. The fact that this nonviolent mode of communication is not the product of armchair moralizing but was the working principle of dynamic social movements like Gandhi's and King's should give activists reason to consider it. Even if one adheres to a "by any means necessary" ethical logic, there is reason to believe that for social movements the most moral means is ultimately the most effective means.

(3) People who want a nonviolent ethic of communication

Many proponents of dialogue and nonviolence have thought it necessary to advocate an approach to communication that is tentative, relativistic, and indifferent. To the degree that this has been done, the criticisms made of dialogue and nonviolence are justified. An approach to communicative action is available which is committed to dialogue and nonviolence without demanding speakers renounce passionate, critical activism for social change. Drawing on pioneering figures in the study of nonviolence, dialogue, and feminist rhetorical theory, I argue that people committed to nonviolence as a way of life should embrace an alternative approach to persuasion rather than renounce persuasion altogether.

One of my goals in this project is to bring insights from conflict transformation and nonviolent theory to bear on social conflict, in particular the conflicts that make up American political polarization. This project is one attempt to bring peacemaking to the culture war, as it were, not by avoiding conflict but by engaging in it in a constructive way.

(4) Christians

Many Christians, at least in America, find themselves navigating a tension between (1) their commitment to proclaim the good news, as seen in the life and teachings of Jesus and the actions of the saints, and (2) the view that evangelism is against what Peter Gomes calls “the etiquette of pluralism” and at worst is a form of colonialist oppression. The final chapter is an attempt to resolve this tension by proposing a model for Christian witness in which Christians embody the transformative nonviolence of the gospel they seek to communicate. I argue that Jesus’s command to love your enemies entails a posture of constructive criticism that is an essential part of the Christian life. This posture not only characterizes behavior that we typically think of as communicative (teaching, preaching, evangelism, activism) but is present in all symbolic action. Hence, Christian witness is not merely a subset of Christian ethics (the part concerned with communication), rather communication offers a lens to understanding all of Christian ethics.

Christians are susceptible to the mercurial, often hypocritical approach to communication ethics previously described. For example, Christian apologists regularly exhort their readers to be compassionate in their interactions, but videos with titles like “Christian Pastor Absolutely Destroys Muslim Apologist”¹³ rack up hundreds of thousands of views. While there have been good scholarly efforts to think theologically about communication ethics,¹⁴ Christian reflection on communication often amounts to little more than a jumble of marketing strategies and moral

¹³ “Christian Pastor Absolutely Destroys Muslim Apologist,” published on October 14, 2016 by NBT Zone. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LneGusIOXJA>.

¹⁴ Recent examples include Tim Muehlhoff and Todd Lewis, *Authentic Communication: Christian Speech Engaging Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010); Elmer J. Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defense of Proselytizing and Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011); Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger and Theresa F. Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict: Compassionate Leadership in Action* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013); and Robert H. Woods Jr. and Naaman Wood, eds., *Words and Witnesses: Communication Studies in Christian Thought from Athanasius to Desmond Tutu* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018).

platitudes. This project is an attempt to address this problem and point the way toward a more comprehensive theology of communication.

Chapter Outline

In the first chapter, I survey and critique the three major standpoints in communication ethics, which I label Civility, Victory, and Open-mindedness. These three voices together account for most of the popular understanding of communication ethics as well as much of the scholarly work done in this field. For Civility advocates, activism must be governed by a set of rules for respectful engagement. For Victory advocates, the ends justify the means, and for the sake of a more just social order may need to engage in indoctrination, dismissive arguments, silencing, and *ad hominem* attacks in order to attain it. For Open-mindedness advocates, it is violent to impose one's values on others, so attempts to persuade are immoral or at least highly suspect.

I argue that all three perspectives have serious shortcomings, but that each voice expresses a valuable concern. We want our activism to be *moral, effective, and nonviolent*, respectively. My goal is not merely to critique these three perspectives, but to advocate for a mode of communication for social change that addresses their driving concerns.

As I show in chapter 2, there are close parallels between these three perspectives in communication ethics and three major positions on the ethics of war. The Civility perspective has much in common with just-war theory, the Victory perspective has much in common with realism/crusaderism, and the Open-mindedness perspective is similar to Tolstoian pacifism. I argue that the rules of Civility operate much like the *jus in bello* rules of just-war theory: easy to adhere to in theory, but in practice routinely abandoned by all parties for the sake of winning.

Drawing on conflict theory and social psychology, I explain how conflicts make it possible for people to break their own rules of engagement without recognizing that they are doing so. Indeed, the same public figures who speak of the need of civility and unity are often the ones most willing to resort to uncivil and intentionally divisive speech. In any “us versus them” framework, the perceived necessity for “us” to prevail over “them” tends to render moral rules inert precisely when they are needed most. The rules of civility, whatever their merits as an ethical theory, are largely ineffective at constraining immoral practices when the chips are down.

Many of the prevailing voices in communication ethics as an academic discipline suffer from the same drawbacks as civility advocacy. By placing restraints on the means communicators use, independent of the ends communicators hope to achieve, communication ethicists have limited success in their efforts to make social conflicts more moral. Given that the rules of civility are often abandoned for the sake of the ends one is striving for, in chapter 3 I ask whether these ends—rather than a set of universal rules—might themselves offer a better resource for moral constraint. In so doing, and continuing the parallel between the ethics of war and the ethics of communication, I draw on the nonviolent philosophy of Gandhi, King, Barbara Deming, Desmond Tutu, and others.

As King says, “In a real sense, the means represent the ideal in the making and the end in progress. So in the long run destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends, because the end is preexistent in the means.”¹⁵ If one wants to bring about a more equitable society, for example, one must do so by equitable means. This principle has often been treated as something

¹⁵ King, *A Testament of Hope*, 102.

mysterious, but a pragmatic case can be made for this principle if we pay attention to the dynamics of communication.

To illustrate this point, I analyze three different authors who each argue that in order to attain their particular ends, specific forms of communication are necessary. *How* one communicates is integrally related to *what* one actually conveys. The feminist rhetorician Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, for one, argues that a central tenet of feminism is that women must be free to reflect on their own experiences rather than being subjected to authoritative interpretations. Even when done in the name of women's liberation, telling women how they should feel about their own lives is ironically stifling women's voices. Thus, for Campbell, an open, dialogical, consciousness-raising style of communication is integrally related to the pursuit of women's liberation. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire makes a similar argument, writing that propaganda for the cause of liberation ironically perpetuates oppression because it dehumanizes those it seeks to empower. Liberators need to be committed to dialogue, Freire argues, not because of some universal moral rules but because the task of liberation itself demands dialogical engagement. The means we use to convey our message themselves convey a message, and when that message is at odds with our communicative goals, we betray our own cause in the very act of advocating for it.

I call communication like this "integral communication" (IC) and arguments like Campbell's and Freire's "integral communication criticism" (ICC). In chapter 4, I analyze how Søren Kierkegaard uses ICC to contend that dialectical, indirect communication is needed in order to influence self-proclaimed Christians to apply the gospel to their own life. In their respective fields, each of these three authors argues that the ends of communication provide constraints on the means communicators use. Each author relies on an understanding of

communication and symbolic action that is not merely instrumental but expressive. Though they write in different contexts and have different goals, each of them contends that a critical, dialogical approach is more conducive to achieving their goals than other rhetorical strategies. I argue that their work, and the concept of integral communication, provides a way of understanding Gandhi's and King's idea that the end is preexistent in the means. In the fifth chapter, I return to the nonviolent direct action tradition to analyze in greater depth how Gandhi, King, and others use ICC to guide and inform their activism.

Gandhi and King argue for an approach to social conflict that combines compassion for the needs and concerns of their opponents with a resolute opposition to the injustices these opponents perpetrate and the illusions that rationalize these injustices. Using the work of Barbara Deming, I argue that this combination of compassion and resistance, when expressed in ways opponents can recognize both aspects, forms a gestalt with tremendous rhetorical power. Respect and respectability without challenge and protest will not contribute to the development of a more equitable society. But neither will challenge and protest without respect and respectability. By attending to how nonviolent direct actionists combine these two pressures, we can develop an alternative to the Civility, Victory, and Open-mindedness perspectives on communication ethics, but one that shares these perspectives' concerns for moral, effective, and nonviolent communication.

The sixth chapter focuses specifically on Christian theology. Applying what I am here calling ICC, Mennonite theologian John D. Roth writes, "The method of proclaiming the gospel has to be consistent with the noncoercive substance of the message that we are proclaiming. Thus, true Christian witness can never proceed as an argument designed to bully the listener into a corner with clever arguments or overpowering rhetoric. Instead, Christian witness always

proceeds as an invitation.”¹⁶ The final chapter is an attempt to elaborate Roth’s point, and to show that this invitational witness is compatible with making prophetic and incisive criticisms, taking controversial stands, and employing rigorous argumentation.

Christianity offers an alternative to antagonism because it is rooted not in an “us versus them” logic but in the logics of “us for them” and “God for us all.” I argue that Christian witness always proceeds as “good news.” Gospel is not only the content but the form of Christian proclamation. This conclusion can help Christians engage in political, ethical, and cultural conflicts in ways that are simultaneously more persuasive and more faithful to their convictions.

¹⁶ John D. Roth, *Beliefs: Mennonite Faith and Practice* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), 31.

1. The Three Voices in the Ethics of Communication

In debates over the ethics of communication for social change, there are three dominant voices. They are what I call the Civility standpoint, the Victory standpoint, and the Open-mindedness standpoint. By “voices” here, I mean relatively consistent ways people talk and think about the ethics of communication. These are not formal schools of thought, but rather the competing ethical logics by which ordinary people evaluate communicative practices. The three voices disagree not only on what kinds of communication should be encouraged and discouraged, but on the shape of ethical justification. Victory maintains that the ends justify the means, whereas for Civility and Open-mindedness the means themselves have moral significance. These standpoints also involve different positions on the ethical status of persuasion—for Civility, it is necessary; for Victory, it is optional; for Open-mindedness, it is immoral.

In this chapter, I will survey and evaluate these three standpoints. But first, a few preliminary clarifications are in order. Though these standpoints by no means exhaust the field of communication ethics, they are the perspectives that any work on communication ethics in the public sphere has to respond to. The authors summarized in this chapter are not the originators of these positions, but rather serve as ideal types, representing three ethical logics that will be familiar even to readers who have never studied this field. In calling them “voices” or “standpoints,” I do not mean to suggest that the thinkers who propound these positions form three homogeneous groups. There are, for example, intramural debates between advocates of civility, the details of which I do not elaborate here. I also do not wish to suggest that any individual thinker can be safely categorized as simply within one camp or the other. Quite the opposite, in fact—these three voices exist in tension within each of us, taking precedence in

different situations, as I will argue in the next chapter. I should also clarify at the outset that these voices are not merely positions in the academic discipline called communication ethics. These are the voices of communication ethics in practice—the voices heard through bullhorns and blog posts, from behind pulpits and podiums, in talk shows and training sessions. When it comes to the ethics of communication for social change, the scholarly conversation maps onto and blurs into the popular conversation. Finally, though I suspect these three standpoints are found internationally, my focus will be on political, ethical, and religious conflicts in the United States.

After surveying these three standpoints in Sections I-III, I will argue that there are shortcomings to all three perspectives. In Section IV, I will argue that the Open-mindedness standpoint is limited in its applicability. Then in Sections V-VII I will give four arguments Civility advocates make against Victory and four arguments Victory makes against Civility. All of these objections, I maintain, have merit. The chapter ends with a final comparison of Civility and Victory and a reflection on why the debate between these two perspectives seems interminable. In chapter 2 I demonstrate that the debate between these three standpoints has structural similarities with the debate between just-war theory, realism/crusaderism, and nonresistant pacifism. This comparison with the ethics of war sheds light on some of the impasses and self-deceptions of communication ethics. In subsequent chapters, I suggest a way forward inspired by the tradition of nonviolent direct action that takes into consideration the insights and criticism of all three dominant voices.

I. The Etiquette of Democracy: Stephen L. Carter on Civility

Stephen L. Carter is a Professor at Yale Law School and a bestselling author. His 1998 book *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy*¹ was written at a high-water mark for discussions of civility in the United States and since its publication it has become one of the most frequently cited books on the topic. Like many in the 1990s, Carter has a rather grim evaluation of contemporary public discourse; on Carter's evaluation, American culture is undergoing a "crisis" of social relations. He cites an upsurge in books, articles, and studies which address particular forms of incivility, like "the relentlessly negative character of our political campaigns, the nastiness of public moral argument, [and] the viciousness of our campus debates over everything from curriculum to rules for student behavior."² Incivility seems to be on the rise, and the fact that calls for civility are also on the rise only attests to this fact. These recent calls for civility, Carter argues, are hampered by the fact that they do not come from a comprehensive vision of what civility is and why it matters. It is this vision that Carter seeks to provide in his book.

His first task is to provide a definition of civility. The subtitle of the book provides a guide to Carter's working definition, according to which civility rests at the intersection of manners, morals, and the etiquette of democracy. First, civility is about manners, not simply in the sense of table manners or guidelines for formal occasions, but in the sense of everyday interactions between individuals. This includes ordinary behavior not typically considered within the scope of ethics. For Carter, civility includes saying "please" and "thank you," dressing appropriately, and maintaining eye contact. Civility infuses everyday social interactions, and is

¹ Stephen L. Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

² Carter, *Civility*, 9-10.

often more a matter of unconscious norms than moral judgments. It is closer to common courtesy than to an explicit moral philosophy.

At the same time, though, Carter resists the reduction of civility to mere manners. It is not simply a matter of “which fork to use and how to tell invited guests that the wedding is off,”³ and one can be polite and well-mannered without being civil. The second dimension of civility is morality. According to Carter, it was in the wake of the First World War that etiquette (dealing with social propriety) and ethics (dealing with turpitude and rectitude) became disentangled in the Western imagination. One purpose of the book is to “re-entangle etiquette and ethics,” to illustrate the moral dimension of everyday social intercourse.⁴ “Perhaps,” Carter writes, “good manners are a moral issue; perhaps how we treat people *does* matter; and, if so, then following rules that require us to treat other people with genuine respect surely is morally superior to not following them... So perhaps civility, very far from being a sideshow in our judgments about right and wrong, should be very close to the main event.”⁵ That is to say, the concept of civility has more to do with ethics than we typically associate with manners, and more to do with manners than we typically associate with ethics.

Civility is also a political concept for Carter. The third part of the subtitle, “the etiquette of democracy,” suggests that Carter always has one eye on the public sphere. Civility is political in the broad sense in that it comprises the rules by which humans live together. Civility is the glue that bonds the *polis*. But it is also political for Carter in the more typical sense, in that the rules of civility should dictate how we should debate issues and campaign for causes, how

³ Carter, *Civility*, 35.

⁴ Carter, *Civility*, 12.

⁵ Carter, *Civility*, 35. Cf. 11, “Rules of civility are thus also rules of morality: it is morally proper to treat our fellow citizens with respect, and morally improper not to. Our crisis of civility, then, is part of a larger crisis of morality.”

political leaders should behave and be treated, and what legislation ought to be passed. For Carter, the rules of civility are not merely applicable in democratic societies, they are called for by the nature of democracy itself. He writes,

As the British historian Andrew St. George has pointed out, democracy itself ‘can be seen not only as a type of government but a system of manners, a form of social life.’ Our democratic commitments, whether to liberty, equality, due process, or perhaps simple respect for the election returns, may all be seen as rules of etiquette, behaviors that are necessary to allow us to travel in democratic peace with our fellow passengers.⁶

Thus it is not simply due to personal preference that the bulk of Carter’s examples come from the political realm, and even those that do not are often related to political life.⁷ Civility is deeply tied up with the responsibilities of citizenship. Insofar as citizens neglect these responsibilities, they risk eroding the nation’s foundations—incivility is not only a moral failing but a threat to the well-being of a body politic. Carter makes use of the etymological connection between “civility” and “civilization,” arguing that they rise and fall together.

Hence for Carter civility is at the intersection of etiquette, morality, and politics; all three dimensions are captured in his definition of civility as “an attitude of respect, even love, for our fellow citizens.”⁸ His account of the decline of civility in the twentieth century is thus not primarily a matter of the “big” ethical issues nor of the departure of Victorian codes of behavior, but rather of the practices of trust and generosity that mark our public discourse. He tries to reconstruct civility in the wake of this decline by recovering habits of interaction that encourage us to foster social unity and recognize the humanity in ourselves and others. The principal way Carter goes about this recovery is the exposition of fifteen rules, such as “Civility requires us that

⁶ Carter, *Civility*, 23–24. Cf. 279.

⁷ I have in mind Carter’s discussions of the family, the church, and solitude as sites in which civic virtues are formed, which then influence individuals’ behavior in the public square.

⁸ Carter, *Civility*, xii.

we listen to others with knowledge of the possibility that they are right and we are wrong,” “Civility requires that we express ourselves in ways that demonstrate our respect for others,” and “Civility allows for criticism of others, and sometimes even requires it, but the criticism should always be civil.”⁹ Though he does not use the term communication ethics, most of these rules are normative injunctions to communicate ethically.

Carter’s justifications for these rules are drawn from the three dimensions of civility—manners, morals, and politics. That is: (1) We should be civil because civility fosters shared commitments, which are valuable if for no other reason than because they are *shared* and thus enable people within a society—even strangers and rivals—to get along together;¹⁰ (2) We should be civil because it is morally right to treat other people with respect; the “virtue of acting with love toward our neighbors” is central to the moral teaching of Judaism, Christianity, and other religious and non-religious traditions;¹¹ (3) We should be civil because democratic societies require civility in order to thrive. The erosion of civility brings with it a devolution to a dog-eat-dog barbarism; thus the sacrifices of civility need to continue for everyone to enjoy the benefits of social order.¹²

We see elements of all three justifications in the following passage: “But if we are mean-spirited and closed-minded, we cannot hold the public dialogues on which a successful democracy rests. And if we believe that freedom is separate from morality, we cannot construct the shared moral commitments on which every successful society is built.”¹³ Note the emphasis on *shared commitments*, *moral uprightness*, and the *success of the democracy*—these three are

⁹ Carter, *Civility*, 139, 162, 217. All fifteen rules are summarized on pp. 277–286.

¹⁰ Carter, *Civility*, chapter 5.

¹¹ Carter, *Civility*, 18, cf. 11, 23.

¹² Carter, *Civility*, chapter 3.

¹³ Carter, *Civility*, 80.

what is at stake in Carter’s call for civility. Civility requires that we must, from time to time, give up something we desire for the demands of social cohesion, moral virtue, and the flourishing of the nation. The fifteen rules, and Carter’s elaboration of what following them looks like in practice, are a self-admittedly preliminary attempt to specify how one should be civil in different scenarios. Carter’s book serves two purposes: first, uniting different conversations about the appropriateness of certain kinds of discourse (political attack ads, rudeness, demonization, indoctrination, etc.) within the conceptual framework of civility and incivility. Second, making prescriptions about how to behave civilly in specific situations in an attempt to kick-start this unified conversation about civility. The latter is more tentative; Carter even says the book is more a “prayer” for civility than an exhaustive code of civility.¹⁴ But the fifteen rules, though individually vague, together provide a comprehensive vision of how citizens should treat one another. Carter’s depiction of the *vir bonus, dicendi peritus* (the good man speaking well)¹⁵ serves as his answer to a myriad of social and political problems besetting an increasingly fragmented America. Before discussing the Civility standpoint any further, we must turn to the outspoken representative of the Victory standpoint, Saul Alinsky.

II. Realistic Radical: Saul Alinsky on Victory

“The epitaph for Saul Alinsky should read: ‘Here lies a man who antagonized more people than any contemporary American.’ He would consider it high praise.”¹⁶ This remark summarizes Alinsky’s career well. As a community organizer, Alinsky cultivated the public persona of the ultimate agitator, a gadfly for social justice *par excellence*. This persona suffuses

¹⁴ Carter, *Civility*, 277.

¹⁵ This phrase comes initially from Cato the Elder but was popularized by Quintilian.

¹⁶ Irv Kupcinec, quoted in Sanford D. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky, His Life and Legacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 540.

his influential 1971 book *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* and its precursor, *Reveille for Radicals*.¹⁷ In *Rules*, Alinsky attempts to equip young radicals with the tools they need to organize effectively for social change. He frames these tactics within a broader ethical vision of realism (in the sense of *Realpolitik*). The first chapter begins, “What follows is for those who want to change the world from what it is to what they believe it should be. *The Prince* was written by Machiavelli for the Haves on how to hold power. *Rules for Radicals* is written for the Have-Nots on how to take it away.”¹⁸ The status of the audience is different, but the philosophy is roughly the same: people are motivated principally by self-interest, fear and division are more effective than love, and concrete results are to be prized over moral purity.

The “realistic” in Alinsky’s subtitle is thus contrasted with “idealistic,” in the sense of hoping for a better world but not being willing to do what it takes to bring it about. Alinsky saw this idealism as a major obstacle for young radicals; their moral reservations need to be overcome in order for them to organize effectively. Hence, Alinsky does not simply describe useful tactics; he focuses primarily on those tactics that might be considered morally dubious. *Rules for Radicals* is as much an argument against idealistic moralizing as it is a guidebook for community organizing. When Alinsky writes, “in the war against social evils there are no rules of fair play,” this is not a mere aside but rather the main thesis of his books.¹⁹ Put differently, we can say that Alinsky’s main point is that good intentions are not enough, one has to have the street smarts and the courage to be uncivil when needed for the greater good. Writing of radical groups, he says, “Their mutual goal is so good and so bright that it is not important if one must

¹⁷ Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); *Reveille for Radicals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

¹⁸ *Rules*, 3.

¹⁹ *Reveille*, 154.

go through a few devious valleys and shadows in the struggle for the people's world."²⁰ The two books serve as a guided tour of these devious valleys, complete with stories from Alinsky's time working in Chicago, Kansas City, and Rochester.

To say that Alinsky wants to get past moral reservations is not to say that Alinsky has no ethics whatsoever. He relies on a distinction between morals and values.²¹ *Values* are a matter of ultimate goals, whereas *morals* are standards of appropriate action. Values are a matter of what ought to be pursued (the ends); morals are a matter of how one pursues them (the means). For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use "ethics" as an umbrella term that encompasses values, morals, and the relationship between them.

Alinsky fought tooth and nail for values, including "freedom, equality, justice, peace, and the right to dissent."²² These values are the stars by which radicals steer their ships, and lengthy paeans to these values can be found throughout Alinsky's books. While lauding these values, Alinsky derides morals at every possible opportunity. For Alinsky, the only question to be asked of means is not "are they moral?" but "do they help attain the ends?" The good course of action is the one that works, *simpliciter*. What we call morality is solely a matter of interpretation and rationalization, and should be attended to only when it strategic to do so. He writes,

Life and how you live it is the story of means and ends. The *end* is what you want, and the *means* is how you get it. Whenever we think about social change, the question of means and ends arises. The man of action views the issue of means and ends in pragmatic and strategic terms. He has no other problem; he thinks only of his actual resources and the possibilities of various choices of action. He asks of ends only whether they are achievable and worth the cost; of means, only whether they will work. To say that corrupt means corrupt the ends is to believe in

²⁰ *Reveille*, 152.

²¹ This distinction can be found throughout *Rules for Radicals*, though Alinsky does not state it explicitly. It has its roots in the work of Max Weber.

²² *Rules*, 46.

the immaculate conception of ends and principles. The real arena is corrupt and bloody.²³

Alinsky's rhetoric creates a clear dichotomy between two types of people.²⁴ On the one side there are moralists who worry about "the ethics of the means used by the Have-Nots,"²⁵ who claim to have the same values as the radicals but are scrupulous about using corrupt means. These are the people who are not personally invested in the issue and are distant from the actual conflict, the comfortable armchair idealists hemming and hawing about their own moral hang-ups. On the other side is "the man of action," the radical who is out on the streets getting his hands dirty for the revolution. In Alinsky's constellation, moralists are concerned with "sanctity," "serenity of conscience," "fantasy," "mystical rules," "sitting in judgment," their own "personal salvation," appearing "noble," and "mental shadow boxing." They end up being "non-doers," "passive" and unwitting allies of the powers that be. Alinsky writes of them, "Their fears of action drive them to refuge in an ethics so divorced from political life that it can apply only to angels, not to men." Radicals, however, are occupied with "victory," "life," what is "real," matters of "life and death," using "power," and being "effective." Like general who use guerilla tactics, radicals do what is necessary to win, and will justify these tactics when they write the history books. This is the only role morality plays for Alinsky—as a rationalization, a potentially useful myth. "You do what you can with what you have and clothe it with moral garments," he writes.²⁶

²³ *Rules*, 24

²⁴ *Reveille*, 27–30. Alinsky frames this as the difference between liberals, who want social change but do not do what it takes to get it, and radicals, who want social change and are willing to do what it takes to get it. Alinsky writes, "Time need not be wasted on Conservatives," presumably defining conservatives as those who do not want social change; *Reveille* 26. Cf. *Rules* 24ff.

²⁵ *Rules*, 25.

²⁶ All of these quotations and the warfare rhetoric come from chapter 3 of *Rules for Radicals*.

So what are these tactics? Alinsky gives thirteen rules to guide the actions taken by community organizers.²⁷ These rules are not rules in the sense of moral obligations (like Carter's fifteen rules), but strategic principles that, if followed, increase one's chance of winning. Alinsky's rules have less in common with the moral injunctions of Ten Commandments than with the tactical maxims of Sun-Tzu's *The Art of War*. Important to note is that Alinsky is especially concerned with overcoming the moral reservations community organizers have about employing these tactics. His primary goal in the books is to silence the voice of the moralists and to encourage his readers to act as realistic radicals. The stories he tells to illustrate the rules thus tend to be stories of Alinsky breaking societal taboos for the sake of victory. He positively advocates:

- demonizing others, including smear campaigns based on lies
- interrupting people, silencing them, and refusing to listen to them
- outright dishonesty (both to his own group and to their opponents)
- indoctrination and manipulation
- rudeness and vulgarity
- drawing on base motivations, including racism
- hypocrisy and inconsistency
- threatening others, intentionally inducing confusion and fear
- self-promotion and boasting
- playing up divisions between people, polarizing groups against one another.

One might think that Alinsky focuses on these stories because he enjoys reveling in his own naughtiness, but for him it is necessary to overcome moralism and think strictly in terms of effectiveness in the pursuit of ethical goals. Only someone with the moral flexibility to do what is necessary rather than what is polite, combined with a fierce dedication to values and to the cause of the Have-Nots, can bring about real social change.

²⁷ *Rules*, 126ff.

One story captures this well. In the trenches of a conflict with a major corporation, Alinsky was offered evidence that his main opponent was a homosexual. He responded to the man offering him the evidence,

‘Thanks, but forget it. I don’t fight that way. I don’t want to see it... The fact that they fight that way doesn’t mean I have to do it. To me, dragging a person’s private life into this muck is loathsome and nauseous.’ He left. So far, so noble; *but*, if I had been convinced that the only way we could win was to use it, then without any reservations I would have used it. What was my alternative? To draw myself up into a righteous ‘moral’ indignation saying, ‘I would rather lose than corrupt my principles,’ and then go home with my ethical hymen intact? The fact that 40,000 poor would lose their war against hopelessness and despair was just too tragic.²⁸

This is Alinsky’s ethics in a nutshell. For the sake of those forty thousand poor, Alinsky would be willing to resort to tactics he considered loathsome. When it comes to social change, the end justifies the means, and anyone who says otherwise is too preoccupied with their own purity to actually care about the well-being of others. Though the assertion that extortion and muckraking are “loathsome” indicates that Alinsky does have a sense of morality, worrying about civility is in his eyes a luxury afforded to those who do not have to fight for freedom and justice. The communities Alinsky organizes, meanwhile, are *at war*, “fighting for their own children, their own homes, their own jobs, and their own lives,” far too invested in the actual outcome of the struggle to hesitate over social mores.²⁹ Before analyzing other advocates of Victory, let us turn to the third voice in conversations about communication ethics for social change, the Open-mindedness standpoint, represented by Sally Miller Gearhart.

III. Being Just a Listener: Sally Miller Gearhart on Open-mindedness

²⁸ *Rules*, 33.

²⁹ *Reveille*, 154–56.

Feminist scholar Sally Miller Gearhart is no stranger to controversy. In the 1970s, living in San Francisco, she fought for a number of causes; as she later put it, “In my time I’ve taken to the streets for feminism, lesbian/gay/bisexual pride, civil rights, sexual freedom, disability dignity, AIDS education, peace, jobs, justice, nonhuman animals, Central American solidarity, clean air, Jesse Jackson, the constitution, the redwoods, and the union.”³⁰ Despite achieving notable victories for several of these causes, Gearhart later began to rethink the logic of activism in favor of a wholly non-persuasive ethic. She developed an account of the ethics of rhetoric that remains hotly contested—it is, perhaps we should say, controversially non-controversial. Though few agree with Gearhart’s extreme position, she articulates more explicitly than anyone else the perspective I am here calling Open-mindedness. Gearhart is less well-known than Carter or Alinsky, although analogues to her ideas are omnipresent; consider the widely-circulated quotation, “Don’t try to change people. Love them. Love is what changes us.”³¹ At the end of this section, I will discuss Marshall Rosenberg’s more widely-known “Nonviolent Communication” model as a complement to Gearhart’s position.

Gearhart’s manifesto “The Womanization of Rhetoric” begins, “My indictment of our discipline of rhetoric springs from my belief that any intent to persuade is an act of violence.”³² She goes on to argue that the *intent* to change people is inherently violent, and thus rhetoric from ancient Greece till the present has been a tradition of oppression. Gearhart is not criticizing one

³⁰ Sally Miller Gearhart, “Notes from a Recovering Activist,” in *Readings in Feminist Rhetorical Theory*, eds. Karen A. Foss, Sonja K. Foss, and Cindy L. Griffin (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), 266.

³¹ Anonymous. Open-mindedness discourse is common, not only on the internet and college campuses, but in popular religious writings on communication. Reverend Kathy Escobar writes, for example, “The art of loving each other well is letting people be where they are and not trying to convince them to be where I am.” *Faith Shift* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014), 145. Though I do not discuss their work here, Thich Nhat Hanh and Parker Palmer also sometimes express the Open-mindedness standpoint. See Hanh’s *The Art of Communicating* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013) and Palmer’s *A Hidden Wholeness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

³² Sally Miller Gearhart, “The Womanization of Rhetoric,” *Women’s Studies International Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1979): 195.

specific approach to rhetoric, but the very pursuit of persuasion itself. Her argument is based in a strand of New Age metaphysics according to which each entity has its own integrity, an integrity that we violate when we seek to change it. She writes, “Preachers, lawyers, and politicians may congratulate themselves that they are men of reason who have chosen civilized discourse above fighting. Yet where the intent is to change another, the difference between a persuasive metaphor and a violent artillery attack is obscure and certainly one of degree rather than kind. Our rational discourse, presumably such an improvement over war and barbarism, turns out to be in itself a subtle form of Might Makes Right.”³³

For Gearhart, any attempt to change another’s beliefs, attitudes, or practices is thus an insidious form of conquest. There is nothing wrong with a person changing, she reiterates, but wanting someone else to change is inherently manipulative, even violent. This intention violates the integrity of the audience and the rhetor. If we seek to become “nonviolent communicators,” which is an ethical obligation, then we need to develop and internalize a “non-persuasive notion of communication.”³⁴

Dialogue, on her rendering, is the best candidate for this non-persuasive approach to rhetoric. According to her definition, dialogue entails “no intent to enlighten or to persuade,” equality in power and authority between dialogue partners even if one knows more about the topic, and the requirement “that each participant is willing on the deepest level to yield her/his position entirely to the other(s).”³⁵ She acknowledges that this standard for ethical communication is difficult to meet, but in order to replace a “conquer-and-convert” approach to

³³ “The Womanization of Rhetoric,” 197.

³⁴ “The Womanization of Rhetoric,” 201, 198.

³⁵ “The Womanization of Rhetoric,” 199, 198.

communication with “authentic” communication, we need to abandon our felt need to convince others of the truth of our position and seek instead to “enjoy being just a listener.”³⁶

Rather than trying to change people’s minds, an effort which she calls futile as well as unethical, Gearhart seeks instead to understand others. In “Notes from a Recovering Activist,” she chronicles times in her life when she found common ground with people with whom she strongly disagrees. Despite her moral and political convictions, she avoids any sort of debate or confrontation, opting instead for acknowledgement of the other person’s humanity and what she calls “joining,” that is, participating in their lifestyle to see the world from their point of view.

The defining characteristic of Open-mindedness is a commitment to being non-judgmental. This can culminate in the withholding of judgments altogether, and there is an element of skepticism in Gearhart’s emphasis on being just a listener and yielding one’s position entirely to the other. More common is the exhortation to refrain from general judgments of right and wrong but to limit one’s communication to one’s own feelings and experience. In keeping with this emphasis, Marshall Rosenberg’s book *Nonviolent Communication* outlines an approach to communication that withholds moral judgments. “Blame, insults, put-downs, labels, criticism, comparisons, and diagnoses are all forms of judgment,” and are all “life-alienating” forms of communication.³⁷ Rosenberg does not simply reject *ad hominem* attacks, but any form of judgment, including positive evaluations and statements of what “should” be done. The loving alternative to making judgments is to articulate one’s own observations, feelings, needs, and requests. This nonjudgmental form of expression is the backbone of Rosenberg’s program of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), which thousands of people around the world have been

³⁶ “The Womanization of Rhetoric,” 201.

³⁷ Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 2nd ed. (Encinitas, CA: Puddledancer Press, 2003), 15. Cf. 185 on how even positive judgments are life-alienating.

trained in. Rosenberg gives the example of coming to a nonviolent way of expressing his own attitude toward violence:

We make moralistic judgments of people and behaviors that fail to support our value judgments; for example, 'Violence is bad. People who kill others are evil.' Had we been raised speaking a language that facilitated the expression of compassion, we would have learned to articulate our needs and values directly, rather than to insinuate wrongness when they have not been met. For example, instead of 'Violence is bad,' we might say instead, 'I am fearful of the use of violence to resolve conflicts; I value the resolution of human conflicts through other means.'³⁸

For Rosenberg, then, the path to moral speech is through making "I"-statements and restricting one's comments to one's own feelings, values, and experience. This maintains a posture of openness to the other's values and feelings, and encourages mutual understanding and the possibility of a harmonious resolution to interpersonal tensions.

Gearhart and Rosenberg both quote Matthew 7:1, "Judge not lest ye be judged." This serves as the mantra of Open-mindedness. Though Gearhart focuses on the ethics of persuasion and Rosenberg focuses on the ethics of judgment, they agree that:

- (1) people should not appeal to any transcendent standard of right and wrong but instead should ground statements in their own personal experience and values,
- (2) dialogue is an alternative to persuasion, and in dialogue our sole interest is understanding rather than trying to change the interlocutor,
- (3) people should focus on their own needs, feelings, and actions rather than focusing on others' behavior,
- (4) in order to truly listen to someone, people have to resist the temptation to challenge and confront them,

³⁸ *Nonviolent Communication*, 17.

(5) people have a plurality of perspectives, so we should not proclaim our version of the truth as the only version,

(6) participants in a dialogue need to be seen as equals,

(7) criticism is in some sense violent and thus should be avoided.

Gearhart's and Rosenberg's approaches to communication are not so much about resolving conflicts as avoiding them. They call for their nonviolent communicators to make statements that are not mutually exclusive with others' statements in order to replace the violence of debate with the embrace of compassion.

IV. The Limits of Open-mindedness

Now that we have representatives in place of all three voices, we can consider the limits and shortcomings of each, beginning with Open-mindedness. This approach to communication, I will argue, is not so much wrong as limited in its application. There are certainly times when one needs to engage in the non-persuasive, non-judgmental kind of communication advocated by Gearhart, Rosenberg, and others, and these authors are correct that we should rely on this sort of communication more frequently than we do. The world would be a better place if more people engaged in the kind of nonviolent discourse they encourage, and Rosenberg's NVC has been applied fruitfully in countless marriages, families, and corporate settings. But, as I will argue, this cannot apply to all rhetorical situations; sometimes more demanding, critical discourse is needed.

Many advocates of Open-mindedness acknowledge this limitation. The Invitational Rhetoric approach of Karen Foss, Sonja Foss, and Cindy Griffin, inspired by Gearhart's work, advocates a communication that goes "beyond persuasion" and seeks instead to cultivate

understanding and an appreciation of difference instead of changing attitudes or beliefs.³⁹ But these authors note, “We are not asking you to forego the other modes of rhetoric and use invitational rhetoric exclusively,” and explain that in some situations persuasion, argumentation, and even invective are necessary.⁴⁰ In a similar way, the non-persuasive, skeptical form of dialogue that physicist David Bohm advocates has limits that Bohm and his collaborators explicitly acknowledge.⁴¹

For these authors, at least, the open-minded, non-persuasive approach to rhetoric is not ethical in the sense of being the only moral way to communicate, but rather one undervalued method of communication. Non-controversial, invitational speech is a way of communicating we should do more often, not a guideline for all communication in all settings. Indeed, the Open-mindedness voice is often the normative voice in creating specific discursive climates for particular purposes. Groups may agree that participants will not try to persuade one another *in this particular* classroom, therapy session, or interfaith dialogue meeting, for example, while fully recognizing that other forms of discourse are appropriate in other settings.

If these limits are recognized, then so far, so good, though it is worth mentioning that this “in some situations” caveat sits uncomfortably with the pervasive evaluative language and ethical justifications these authors give in their writings. But if we try to take the Open-

³⁹ Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric,” *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995); Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss, *Inviting Transformation*, 3rd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2012); Sonja K. Foss, “Invitational Rhetoric,” in *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, eds. Stephen Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 569–71.

⁴⁰ Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss, *Inviting Transformation*, 18. Cf. Foss and Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion,” 5, 8, 17.

⁴¹ “Finally, we would like to make clear that we are not proposing Dialogue as a panacea nor as a method or technique designed to succeed all other forms of social interaction. Not everyone will find it useful nor, certainly, will it be useful in all contexts.” In David Bohm, Donald Factor, and Peter Garrett, “Dialogue, a Proposal,” *Infed.org*, copyright 1991, http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/bohm_dialogue.htm. For more on Bohm’s view of dialogue, which is not the sense in which I use the word “dialogue” in subsequent chapters, see David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

mindedness approach to be a comprehensive, cross-contextual communication ethic, as Rosenberg and Gearhart seem to, we run into problems. The Open-mindedness approach, when suggested as a cross-contextual communication ethic, suffers from eight interrelated shortcomings.

1. The first and most obvious shortcoming is that it is inconsistent to try to persuade others not to try to persuade others. Gearhart's constraints on ethical communication mean that her own essays are themselves unethical attempts to change people. If we take Open-mindedness as a cross-contextual communication ethic, then advocating it is an instance of what I call self-betraying communication, in which the form betrays the content, which we will discuss at length in chapter 3.

2. Open-mindedness advocates are often so one-sidedly concerned with oppressive dogmatism that they swing the pendulum the other way and end up embracing skepticism. This conclusion ends up undermining the ethical commitments that motivate these perspectives. Gearhart's insistence on yielding one's position to the other, Rosenberg's reliance on I-statements, and Bohm's encouragement to suspend judgment all lead to a dangerous relativism when taken as cross-contextual communicative norms. In their desire to avoid judgmentalism, they abandon judgment altogether. If we never make explicit judgments then we can never hold anyone else accountable to a standard outside of our own preferences.

Consider, for example, Foss and Griffin's argument that rhetors should listen to their audience members so these audience members feel understood and cared for. A few paragraphs later they write, "In invitational rhetoric, the audience's lack of acceptance of or adherence to the perspective articulated by the rhetor truly makes no difference to the rhetor."⁴² I find it difficult

⁴² "Beyond Persuasion," 12.

to imagine a person caring for me who does not simultaneously care whether or not I am making wise and well-informed decisions. Care and indifference are polar opposites. For example, say my friend has been poisoned and I am trying to convince him to take the antidote. If I am not emotionally invested in whether or not he consents, then he is not truly my friend. This logic holds for other instances of persuasion; as James Baldwin writes, “If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don’t see.”⁴³ One does not have to be a dogmatist to admit that persuasion can bring another person closer to the good, the true, or the beautiful.

Though calls for Open-mindedness are often rooted in traditions of feminism and civil rights discourse, the constraints they put on moral communication ironically render immoral some of the classic texts of those movements. Consider, for example, Frederick Douglass’s famous speech “The Meaning of July Fourth to the Negro.”⁴⁴ Though Douglass argues for self-determination—the driving concern of Open-mindedness proponents—his speech is persuasive, challenging, and unwavering. He does not shy away from appealing to transcendent moral standards, trying to change the way people believe and act, condemning others’ behavior, speaking at length without listening to others, insisting that his opponents are wrong, and making exclusive judgments about the evils of slavery. In short, Douglass’s speech does not fit with the seven emphases of Open-mindedness detailed above. Yet it would be difficult to maintain that Douglass’s speech is an example of immoral communication. It does not conform to Rosenberg’s Nonviolent Communication model, yet we would be hard-pressed to call it violent. While Douglass tries to change his hearers and readers, he does not seem to violate their integrity or restrict their freedom. Open-mindedness proponents could argue that this text and other classics

⁴³ *Conversations with James Baldwin*, eds. Fred Standley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 156.

⁴⁴ Frederick Douglass, *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2000), 188–206.

of human rights rhetoric are ultimately immoral, but the burden of proof is on them to do so, and this burden has not been met.

3. Third, the authors typically draw on a narrow and unrepresentative range of examples from which to construct their normative visions of communication. From the examples Gearhart, Bohm, and Rosenberg give, it is clear that the discourse they have in mind is interpersonal conversation, typically about matters of concern but not matters of life and death. The ethic they have in mind loses some of its credibility when one tries to extend it to other discursive contexts or other issues. For example, Foss, Foss, and Griffin recount this episode, “When Gearhart started to criticize a neighbor for allowing his cats to have kittens, for example, she realized that, from a cosmic perspective, she did not have all the information she needed: ‘Who was I to persuade him? How did I know what purpose those kittens might play in his life?’”⁴⁵ Returning to the Douglass test, there is a massive ethical difference between owning kittens and owning slaves. Gearhart’s examples—disagreeing with hunters, loggers, and gun-owners—are by no means trivial, but it is difficult to imagine her advocating suspension of judgment and a willingness to “join” and “yield” when it comes to issues of extreme moral evil. Even if we should be less confrontational in our everyday interactions, Civility and Victory advocates are right that there are moral injustices which call for confrontation.

4. Fourth, the structural social change at which Gearhart and others aim requires persuasion. Gearhart draws a false dichotomy when she writes, “I’ve learned that it is never individual men/people who are my ‘enemy’ but complex systems of exploitation that have emerged from centuries of alienation and perpetuation of violence; it is these systems and that consciousness—

⁴⁵ Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, Cindy L. Griffin, *Feminist Rhetorical Theories* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1999), 283.

and not the people—that I can, with integrity, *hope* to change.”⁴⁶ It is one thing to refuse to antagonize individuals because they perpetuate systems of oppression.⁴⁷ But to change these systems requires changing people; this “consciousness” exists first and foremost in people’s beliefs, attitudes, and presuppositions. Social issues are after all *social*; there is no such thing as changing sexism or militarism or environmental exploitation without changing people’s minds.⁴⁸ To say that one hopes to change these systems without changing people’s minds is not so much idealistic as incoherent.

5. Fifth, Open-mindedness fails to acknowledge that there are forms of persuasion that do not violate but rather respect or even strengthen another person’s integrity. Subsequent chapters will explore this in greater detail, but consider one example. There is an amateur pianist who plays a recital and makes a few small errors. Afterwards she is distraught and wants to give up, but her friend reassures her that she played wonderfully. Her friend mentions how imperceptible the errors were, how everyone was praising her piece after the recital, and how attempting such a difficult piece shows how much progress the pianist has made. In this scenario, the friend is making a persuasive argument in an attempt to change the pianist’s attitudes, beliefs, and actions. But far from controlling or manipulating the pianist, the friend encourages and empowers her. As this example shows, though there are forms of persuasion that are unethical, persuasion in itself does not necessarily violate the integrity of the audience.

6. This segues neatly into a sixth point: Open-mindedness suffers from a lack of ethically relevant distinctions. Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin, for example, talk about how a persuader

⁴⁶ “Notes from a Recovering Activist,” 269.

⁴⁷ More on this point in chapter 5.

⁴⁸ Ellen Gorsevski writes that in Rosenberg’s book, “the key issue of structural violence is almost completely ignored.” *Peaceful Persuasion: The Geopolitics of Nonviolent Rhetoric* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), 166. Later developments in NVC have corrected some of the oversights in Rosenberg’s book. See, for example, Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger and Theresa F. Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict: Compassionate Leadership in Action* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

“controls or influences the nature of another’s life,” without acknowledging that *control* and *influence* are very different. They make a similar unjustified elision between “authority” and “dominance.”⁴⁹ Likewise, Gearhart seems to equate “conquest” with “conversion,” glossing over the difference between these two.⁵⁰ A recurring problem among those who espouse Open-mindedness is the failure to distinguish between the uses and abuses of rhetoric. They treat all instances of persuasion as though they were tantamount to manipulation or silencing, and in the process miss the possibility—or rather, the fact—that many instances of persuasion are not coercive. Consider one example. Foss and Griffin decry persuasive rhetoric because it infringes “on others’ rights to believe and choose and to act in ways they believe are best for them.”⁵¹ But consider the nutritionist who, using scientific evidence, convinces the patient that a low-cholesterol diet will extend his life expectancy. This does not infringe on the patient’s right to choose, but empowers the patient to choose more wisely. To lump this kind of persuasion together with propaganda, peer pressure, and demagoguery is to fail to make an ethically relevant distinction. Part of the task of this dissertation is to demarcate some distinctions between ethical and unethical persuasive discourse; in this sense my project is an attempt to strengthen and clarify rather than refute the Open-mindedness standpoint’s case against unethical forms of persuasion.

7. Similarly, a seventh shortcoming of Open-mindedness is the use of ambiguous language, combined with using terms in a misleading or idiosyncratic way. Consider for example the way David Bohm uses the word “persuasion” in the following passage:

Conviction and persuasion are not called for in a dialogue. The word ‘convince’ means to win, and the word ‘persuade’ is similar. It’s based on the same root as

⁴⁹ “Beyond Persuasion,” 3.

⁵⁰ “The Womanization of Rhetoric,” 196.

⁵¹ “Beyond Persuasion,” 3.

‘suave’ and ‘sweet.’ People sometimes try to persuade by sweet talk or to convince by strong talk. Both come to the same thing, and neither is relevant. There’s no point in being persuaded or convinced. That’s not really coherent or rational. If something is right, you don’t need to be persuaded. If somebody has to persuade you, then there is probably some doubt about it.⁵²

This understanding of persuasion is curious at best, and not supported by dictionaries. We persuade others of true things all the time. Bohm is free to give a stipulative definition for his own purposes, of course, but he does not do so and instead leaves his readers in a muddle.⁵³ In Open-mindedness discourse, words like “power,” “change,” “truth,” and “judgment” also suffer from insufficiently clear usage.

In saying that this is a problem for Open-mindedness, I am not saying that these authors are intentionally misusing words. Sometimes a word has different connotations, and different authors use it in different ways. For Bohm, for example, “dialogue” refers to a type of exploratory conversation that excludes persuasion and assertion. For Martin Buber, by contrast, “dialogue” is a mode of interaction that can include confrontation and judgment.⁵⁴ Neither definition is right or wrong, but when a person advocates for a dialogue or for a more dialogical sort of communication, they ought to specify what they mean by “dialogue,” and this specification happens all too infrequently among writers advocating Open-mindedness.

Finally, the word “impose” is frequently used to refer to unethical forms of persuasion. It is generally assumed that it is wrong to impose one’s beliefs on others, especially one’s religious beliefs. But what exactly this means is rarely if ever spelled out, and I have not been able to find any treatment of what constitutes “imposition.” I am not arguing that one always needs to have a

⁵² *On Dialogue*, 31.

⁵³ For contrast, Franklyn Haiman specifies the way he uses the word “persuasion” when he makes his case against it in “A Re-Examination of the Ethics of Persuasion,” *Central States Speech Journal* 3, no. 2 (1952).

⁵⁴ For a contrast between Bohm and Buber on this point, see “A Conversation with Maurice Friedman,” Jeanine Czubaroff and Maurice Friedman, *Southern Journal of Communication*, 65, nos. 2/3 (Winter/Spring 2000): 244.

pedantic attention to detail in defining one's terms, but when these terms do critical work distinguishing licit from illicit communication, more precision is called for than is typically given.

8. Eighth, and finally, Open-mindedness misdiagnoses the problem with instances of unethical persuasion. The points made by these authors would be more compelling if they focused specifically on the dehumanization that can accompany persuasive efforts, rather than on the intent to persuade itself. It is because dehumanization often accompanies persuasion that broadsides against "persuasion" seem convincing, and by refocusing these authors' arguments on that, we can better appreciate the value of their proposals.

Consider for example a car salesman who sees customers only as dupes to be swindled out of their money, or a politician who sees citizens only as potential votes. In these situations, what is ethically objectionable is the reduction of the audience to something less than fully human in the speech and action of the persuader. No one has characterized this better than Martin Buber, who advocates relating to the other as a "Thou" and not merely as an "It."⁵⁵ Buber, like Gearhart, decries the tendency for rhetors to treat audiences as mere receptacles for the rhetor's ideas. But Buber and Gearhart differ in that Buber believes a person can recognize another person's full humanity and still try to change their beliefs or behavior. Dehumanization is a temptation for persuaders, not an essential aspect of persuasion.

With this in mind, we can say that the value of Open-mindedness writings lies not in their criticisms of persuasion but in their contributions to envisioning forms of collaborative

⁵⁵ On this, see Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), cf. Maurice Friedman's *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960). As Friedman points out, Buber does not say we cannot ever interact with others in the realm of "I-It," but that this realm needs to be opened up by the occasional interruption of the "I-Thou."

communication that help readers avoid the tendency to dehumanize so prevalent in persuasive discourse. This is no small feat. Though the voice of Open-mindedness is unsatisfactory as a cross-contextual communication ethic, it will and should remain part of the ongoing conversation of communication ethics. To say that this perspective has limits is not to deny that it has merit. Though these authors fail to make important distinctions between the uses and abuses of persuasive rhetoric, their call for a more invitational rhetoric puts the abuses of rhetoric into sharp relief. Open-mindedness authors sound a clarion call to examine our ordinary patterns of discourse and be on guard against the subtle forms of manipulation and dehumanization that pervade seemingly innocuous exchanges. Indeed, as will hopefully be clear in later chapters, the theory of communication I advocate in this dissertation is indebted to these authors' visions of nonviolent communication.

V. The State of the Debate

With this understanding of Open-mindedness, we now turn to an evaluation of Civility and Victory, focusing specifically on the ways these voices are heard in the American context. To reiterate, locating authors within these camps is misleading, since most people balance or vacillate between these viewpoints. It is more accurate to think of them as different voices or different clusters of voices in the ethics of criticism and communication for social change.⁵⁶

For Civility, social conflict is raging all around us and efforts need to be taken to constrain the damage. Civility advocates worry that increasing polarization is ushering in a society that is incapable of finding enough common ground to respond collectively to social

⁵⁶ Readers familiar with Richard Johannesen's *Ethics of Human Communication* will recognize similarities between the first two standpoints and what Johannesen calls "political perspectives" and "situational perspectives," respectively. I am indebted to Johannesen and his coauthors for several of the references that follow. Richard L. Johannesen, Kathleen S. Valde, and Karen E. Whedbee, *Ethics in Human Communication*, 6th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2008).

problems. If we do not cultivate the virtues that enable mutual understanding, our options will be at best obstructionist gridlock and at worst civil war. The moral norms of civility, respect, and so on make it possible for people to disagree constructively and work toward compromises, rather than political disputes descending into a Nietzschean power struggle.

The Victory standpoint agrees that we are in the midst of social conflict, but insists that the only ethical way forward is to win. If Civility worries that America is descending into a bald power struggle, Victory sees this power struggle as already the reality of the American socio-political situation. If our communities are to be preserved or our values are to be realized, Victory reasons, then they must be defended against the forces who would trample over them.

Two things are desired by both standpoints—*civic morality and harmony*, on the one hand, and *political victory that enshrines one's set of values in law*, on the other. These desiderata are not always mutually exclusive, but both voices agree that one of these concerns may have to be sacrificed for the sake of the other. The difference between the two voices is which they are willing to cede. Civility advocates accept that the cost of moral communication may include one's side losing. "Civility," Carter writes, "is not merely or even mostly about winning; civility is about sacrifice, and one of the things that might need to be sacrificed is victory."⁵⁷ Civility advocate P.M. Forni writes that winning is important, but insists "This is civility: the ability to internalize the notion that how we play the game is more important than the final score."⁵⁸ For Victory, by contrast, the stakes of the political game are too high—recall Alinsky's forty thousand poor—for us to have moral hang-ups about what we say and do in order to win. The two standpoints recognize that effectiveness and morality are not always at

⁵⁷ *Civility*, 126. Cf. 122.

⁵⁸ Pier Massimo Forni, *Choosing Civility: The Twenty-five Rules of Considerate Conduct* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002), 177.

odds, but each standpoint insists that one of these trumps the other. With that in mind, let us turn to the criticisms these two voices have for one another.

For the rest of this chapter, I will examine in greater detail the debate between these voices as it plays out in popular publications, newspaper editorials, and other media. In talking about this as a “debate,” I am not suggesting that the sources quoted are directly responding to one another or even aware of one another, although several of the authors cite one another and address each other’s points in what could fairly be considered a back-and-forth exchange. Rather, in the next two sections, I will examine the criticisms that each standpoint has for the other, ultimately maintaining that all of the criticisms surveyed here are valid. First, I will summarize four objections Civility writers make against the Victory position.

VI. Knights of the Double Standard: Civility’s Criticism of Victory

1. Civility advocates argue that incivility threatens the social order, harming everyone within it. “America,” Carter writes, “is dying from a refusal to engage in dialogue.”⁵⁹ Carter’s reasoning is as follows: deliberation is vital to the success of a democratic society. In order for people to deliberate, there has to be at least a baseline of trust and mutual understanding. Speech that undermines this minimal trust or inhibits this mutual understanding is thus detrimental to the thriving of democracy. Hence uncivil speech, even if it achieves short-term goals, has the long-term effect of decaying the social order. Philosopher and Civility advocate Matthew Carey Jordan explains this logic clearly,

A system of government in which legislative and executive power are ultimately derived from the persons being governed can function well only if competing ideas can be expressed freely and publicly, so that voters are able to make

⁵⁹ Stephen Carter, *The Dissent of the Governed* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1998), x. Cf. “It is through dialogue and deliberation that democracy advances.” *Civility*, 29.

informed decisions about public policy... For the system to work well, all parties to public disputes need to be willing to be proven wrong, recognize their own cognitive biases and limitations, and assume that their political adversaries are not without wisdom and insight. Healthy (and helpful) public debate presumes that rational dialectic is a valuable tool for acquiring truth: prospects for making progress are enhanced when we seek it together. In other words, pluralistic democratic societies suffer when civility is absent from their public discourse. Thus even those among us who question the value of civility in its own right have strong instrumental reasons for promoting its embrace.⁶⁰

Many if not all Civility advocates make a point like this; on a purely practical level, civility is the grease that enables the engine of democracy to turn.

For Civility advocates, democracy is a delicate achievement, always in danger of collapsing into a war of all against all. The tools of incivility—deception, demonization, manipulation, silencing, dismissing—eat away at the pillars upon which successful democratic society is built. When we cannot trust one another because we believe everyone is only acting from a self-interested agenda, when we do not try to understand or convince one another because we are preoccupied with defeating a monstrous “them,” when we value enshrining our principles in law more than we value the stability and moral fabric of our communities—then we are not far from barbarism.

There is an ecological logic in the pragmatic case for Civility. Any individual act of incivility is like a fisherman overfishing a communal lake. The fisherman assumes his actions are harmless, and justifies his actions by saying his family will eat a better meal that day. But if enough people follow this logic, pretty soon there will be no fish left in the lake and everyone in the community—including the fisherman—will suffer. Similarly, the democratic system is certainly strong enough to survive a few of Alinsky’s devious tactics in Chicago neighborhoods

⁶⁰ Matthew Carey Jordan, “The Virtue of Civility,” *Alabama Humanities Review*, March 31, 2011. <https://alahumanitiesreview.wordpress.com/2011/03/31/the-virtue-of-civility/>.

or a few exaggerations and slanders on a whistle-stop tour. Any one of these actions may achieve something worthwhile in the short run. But as these practices become increasingly common and mainstream, the system itself starts to crumble. This is precisely what Civility advocates see happening in America today, and they argue that in the long run this erosion of democracy harms even those who use uncivil speech.

2. If one consistently denies the possibility of meaningful dialogue, this denial can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In a speech on civility at the University of Michigan, President Obama said, “The problem is that this kind of vilification and over-the-top rhetoric closes the door to the possibility of compromise. It undermines democratic deliberation. It prevents learning—since, after all, why should we listen to a ‘fascist’ or a ‘right wing nut’ or a ‘left wing nut’? It makes it nearly impossible for people who have legitimate but bridgeable differences to sit down at the same table and hash things out.”⁶¹ When we treat disagreements and differences as if they make conversation unnecessary, we are at that moment making such conversations less likely. If one sows distrust, one will reap distrust.

Additionally, antagonism stifles rather than supports learning. Allison Stanger, professor at Middlebury College, describes an incident when an angry mob protested an invited speaker. Protestors started chanting against positions that the speaker had never espoused, assuming that his views on economics and race meant he also held objectionable views on sexuality and other topics. Stanger chalks this up to a tendency to oppose the perceived enemy at the expense of seeking the truth. “Regardless of political persuasion,” she writes, “Americans are deeply susceptible to a renunciation of reason and celebration of ignorance. They know what they know

⁶¹ Barack Obama, quoted in J. Cherie Strachan and Michael R. Wolf, “Calls for Civility: An Invitation to Deliberate or a Means of Political Control?” in *Can We Talk?: The Rise of Rude, Nasty, Stubborn Politics*, eds. Daniel M. Shea and Morris P. Fiorina (New York: Pearson, 2013), 43.

without reading, discussing, or engaging those who might disagree with them.” She continues, “Our constitutional democracy will depend on whether Americans can relearn how to engage civilly with one another... any other way forward would be antithetical to the very ideals of the university and of liberal democracy.”⁶²

Obama’s and Stanger’s argument is that the more we abandon listening and charitable interpretation and resort instead to suspicion and uncivil means of resistance, the more we will misunderstand and mischaracterize our opponents. This will ultimately discredit our cause in the eyes of our opponents and undecided observers, foreclose any opportunities for a mutually beneficial solution, and isolate us ever further from our fellow citizens. The so-called “bubbles” in which we currently live, with various sides at a loss to fathom why others act and believe the way they do, are a direct result of habits of incivility. Not only does democracy suffer, but the pursuit of truth suffers, and those seeking to reform society suffer as well.

3. A third and related objection Civility makes against Victory is to the hypocrisy of those who use uncivil means. There is a superficial sense in which patent hypocrisy harms one’s credibility. Consider Victory advocate David Faris, writing in the wake of Donald Trump’s nomination, “The Democrats must do whatever it takes to recapture power, even if it means adopting tactics that only yesterday they were calling threats to democracy.”⁶³ If Faris’s fellow Democrats followed his advice, it would be difficult to take seriously their future warnings about threats to democracy. Or recall Alinsky insisting “I don’t fight that way” when offered the opportunity to attack an opponent’s sexuality. Since he subsequently says he *would* resort to this

⁶² Allison Stanger, “Understanding the Angry Mob at Middlebury that Gave Me a Concussion,” *New York Times* Op-Ed, March 13, 2017. On how violent campus protest is contrary to the intellectual values of the university, see also Sidney Hook, *Academic Freedom and Academic Anarchy* (New York: Dell, 1971), 84–85.

⁶³ David Faris, “It’s Time for Democrats to Fight Dirty,” *The Week*, December 1, 2016, <http://theweek.com/articles/664458/time-democrats-fight-dirty>.

if it seemed like the only way to win, we should take Alinsky’s “I don’t fight that way”—and his other moral overtures—with a grain of salt. A person cannot vow that they will do whatever it takes to win without thereby becoming untrustworthy in the eyes of potential allies.

There is also a deeper sense in which incivility renders one not just unreliable but incoherent. The pragmatist philosopher Sidney Hook, commenting on the student protests of the late 1960s, writes, “The elitism of student militants makes them knights of the double standard.”⁶⁴ In Hook’s eyes, the student protestors entitle themselves and their approved groups to uncivil means without extending the same privileges to others. For these radicals, whatever “we” do is justified, and whatever “they” do is unjustified, even if the actions are identical to the impartial observer. Students protesting prejudice resort to prejudice, students protesting violence in Vietnam resort to violence at Berkeley, students protesting authoritarianism resort to the “logic of totalitarianism” by imposing their beliefs on the larger population.⁶⁵ According to Hook, this self-righteous insularity and inconsistency erodes the students’ own justifications for protest.

Hook’s diagnosis runs something like this: The protestors decide that giving reasons for their convictions is “mere talk” and opt instead for more effective means. But there can be no justification without reasons. In general, we can say reason-giving is what distinguishes objective standards from personal preference. By refusing to appeal to a standard of right behavior intelligible to outsiders, the students make themselves the final authority on what is right and wrong. In the process, they give observers no way to determine whether they are fighting for a just cause or merely complaining that they are not getting their way. What starts as a campaign

⁶⁴ Sidney Hook, *Academic Freedom and Academic Anarchy*, 114.

⁶⁵ *Academic Freedom and Academic Anarchy*, 113–14.

for justice ends up becoming, through reliance on uncivil means, indistinguishable from a tantrum.

Even if non-argumentative means are justifiable, as Victory insists, there is an inherent danger in abandoning reason-giving. The effort to convince others of the rightness of one's cause keeps that cause grounded in something more authoritative than one's own opinion. Those who take up more coercive forms of self-expression risk not only *seeming* arbitrary but *becoming* arbitrary. Protesters who opt for sloganeering and "body rhetoric" over reasonable discourse are likely to end up incoherent, as the ability for radicals to justify their positions even to one another evaporates. This is what Hook means by "the logic of totalitarianism" taking root in radical groups. He has in mind the irony that so many bloody revolutions start with noble goals but end either in dictatorships or fierce contests between rivals who each see themselves as the instantiation of their once-agreed-upon values.

To put this point a different way, the assumption made by Alinsky and others that there is a clear distinction between morals and values is ultimately untenable. It may seem to make sense to fight by any means necessary in order to secure "those values of equality, justice, freedom, peace, a deep concern for the preciousness of human life, and all those rights and values propounded by Judeo-Christianity and the democratic political tradition."⁶⁶ But in practice, each of these values is acted out in moral practices or it is nothing at all. What is justice if not acting justly? What is peace if not acting peaceably? What is "Judeo-Christianity" if not loving your neighbor? In pooh-poohing morality, Alinsky renders his own convictions unintelligible—perhaps even to himself. In the short run, it might make sense to act immorally for the sake of a

⁶⁶ Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 12.

set of values, but in the long run those values become mere talk when they do not guide moral practices.

4. Finally, Civility advocates press Victory advocates on the morality of civil interaction. Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to summarize these arguments, Civility contends that the ends do not justify the means and that there are some actions which are intrinsically wrong regardless of the intentions of the actor. The most direct case made against Victory is that the uncivil tactics Victory tries to justify are wrong *simpliciter*. Even if it does not further one's political or religious cause, Civility insists, one should treat others respectfully because human beings have inherent dignity. Recall that for Carter the rules of civility are simultaneously rules of etiquette, norms for democracy, and moral imperatives. Even if one brackets democracy and cultural refinement, moral imperatives are binding on all people at all times. Victory advocates often treat the rules of civility as mere conventions of polite society, bypassing the question of moral duties entirely.

If something is the right thing to do, to ask whether it works is beside the point. For Civility, being moral needs no further justification.

VII. Fighting with One Hand Tied behind Your Back: Victory's Criticism of Civility

We now turn to the most common objections Victory makes against Civility advocacy. Whereas Civility advocates tend to make arguments against uncivil speech, and by extension those who would justify it, Victory advocates do not argue against civil speech but rather against calls for civility from pundits and political figures. Their arguments are not against civility per se, but against the action of telling others that they ought to be civil. Columnist Maureen Dowd, for example, criticized Bill Clinton's prayer for civility in 1997, writing:

Washington was designed for conflict. The last thing this city needs is a sappy descent into woozy New Age psychobabbling politics in which nobody is allowed to say anything sharp or in any way shatter the harmony of the spheres... The Clintons have always operated with a means-justify-the-ends philosophy. Now that they have achieved their ends, they can afford to get all lofty about their means. Win! Win! Win! has been replaced by love, love, love. It's hypocritical and sanctimonious and self-righteous and cynical.⁶⁷

In Dowd's critique, we see examples of several of the points Victory advocates make against Civility.

1. First, Victory advocates accuse Civility advocates of wanting to quash the kind of conflicts necessary for political progress.⁶⁸ Following Civility norms, they assert, amounts in practice to the friction-free world of Open-mindedness, where no one is allowed to "shatter the harmony of the spheres." Carter takes pains in his book to respond to this objection, reiterating that one can express disagreements and even protest within the bounds of civil discourse. But since appeals for civility are often made in the midst of conflicts and often hearken back to some idealized past consensus, these appeals can fairly be interpreted as attempts to silence controversy.

If partisans have arrived at the conclusion that uncivil means are their only viable avenue for expressing their convictions, then to tell them that they cannot use uncivil means is tantamount to telling them they cannot express their convictions. Some Victory advocates insist that this stifling is *precisely why appeals to civility are made* in the first place. Calls for civility are an attempt to disqualify one's challengers, to label their speech unworthy of further

⁶⁷ Maureen Dowd, "Bubba Don't Preach," *New York Times*, Op-Ed, February 9, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/09/opinion/bubba-don-t-preach.html>.

⁶⁸ Harvard Law professor Randall Kennedy writes, "The civility movement is deeply at odds with what an invigorated liberalism requires: intellectual clarity; an insistence upon grappling with the substance of controversies; and a willingness to fight loudly, openly, militantly, even rudely for policies and values that will increase freedom, equality, and happiness in America and around the world." In "State of the Debate: The Case Against 'Civility'" *The American Prospect*, November–December 1998, <http://prospect.org/article/state-debate-case-against-civility>.

consideration and thus to win by default. Outlining the standards of civility is a sort of moral gerrymandering, defining “us” as the reasonable ones and “them” as the intemperate ravers. Though Civility advocates frame their calls for civility as efforts to set rules *for* social conflict, Victory sees these calls as offensive maneuvers *within* an ongoing social conflict. Law professor Randall Kennedy is typical; he writes that Bill Clinton “deployed the politics of civility against his Republican opponents.”⁶⁹ According to Kennedy and Dowd, Clinton used calls for unity and compassion as a weapon for seizing the moral high ground.

This point, that calls for civility are thinly-veiled attempts to silence dissent, is especially trenchant when Victory advocates address the role power inequality plays in the policing of discourse. According to Benjamin DeMott’s widely-discussed article “Seduced by Civility,” calls for civility are an attempt for those in power, “the leader classes,” to stifle dissent and insulate themselves from threats of those without power.⁷⁰ Civility discourse is a tool for the preservation of the status quo, DeMott argues, more so than an application of a consistent ethic. Labeling angry, critical speech uncivil is one way the 1% maintains its dominance over the 99%.

When this power inequality takes the form of racial inequality, calls for civility can be an attempt to silence marginalized racial groups, as happened routinely during the Civil Rights era. Historian Thomas Sugrue writes, “Looking back at the 1960s through the prism of contemporary debates about what is civil and what is not, overlooks in the end the fact that to those whose power (economic, social, racial) was threatened by civil rights, the whole struggle was uncivil.” Sugrue continues, “Civility is in the eye of the beholder. And when the beholder wants to maintain an unequal status quo, picketers, protesters, and preachers alike are uncivil as much

⁶⁹ “State of the Debate.” This language of civility discourse as a weapon comes from Benjamin DeMott, “Seduced by Civility: Political Manners and the Crisis of Democratic Values,” *The Nation*, December 9, 1996, 18.

⁷⁰ DeMott, “Seduced by Civility,” 14.

because of their message as their methods.”⁷¹ Why should we suspect that attempts to label some speech as uncivil are any different now than they were then?

2. Second, opponents of Civility frequently charge its proponents with hypocrisy. This objection is directed not principally to writers like Carter but rather at public figures who use uncivil means to gain votes or ratings but then condemn others for doing the same. I will discuss this problem in greater depth in the next chapter. A related and more complicated objection is that these public figures speak out against uncivil speech as a way of distracting from other, more “civilized” forms of injustice they commit. DeMott makes this case at length, arguing that politicians will condemn obscenity or muckraking while approving of policies that harm and exploit millions. Incivility is a kind of whipping boy that gets blamed for the ills of society by those who are themselves actually responsible for exacerbating the ills of society. Professor and political commentator John Patrick Leary writes, “The supposed crisis of ‘civility’ today is actually a red herring, meant to distract us from real social conflict.”⁷² Leary blames the media as much as the politicians for creating a cultural climate in which Americans are so preoccupied with indignation about the political parties’ strategies for winning that we ignore the damage their policies are doing to our country. Taking issue with incivility in this context is, to borrow an image from the Bible, straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel.⁷³

These two objections can be summarized together: Civility advocates focus too narrowly on the methods people use to convey their message, and this amounts to silencing the message itself. Whether this is done intentionally as a way of stifling dissent or as a result of distraction

⁷¹ Thomas Sugrue, “Civil Rights, Civility, and Disruption,” in *Civility and Democracy in America*, eds. Cornell W. Clayton and Richard Elgar (Pullman, Wash.: Washington State University Press, 2012), 28.

⁷² John Patrick Leary, “Against Civility,” *Guernica Magazine*, November 16, 2012,

<https://www.guernicamag.com/john-patrick-leary-against-civility/>

⁷³ Matthew 23:24.

and misguided priorities, the question “Is this person or group speaking morally?” all too often draws attention away from the more important question “What are they saying and is it true?” For the Victory standpoint, thinking about the morality of discourse is either a tool of suppression perpetuated by the leader class, a diverting red herring that prioritizes style over substance, or a defensive maneuver those complicit in injustice employ to insulate themselves from confrontation.

3. A third objection, often made in defense of uncivil forms of speech and symbolic action, is that these are the only way for disempowered groups to get their voices heard. Civil discourse between equals would be preferable, but due to systemic inequality certain voices have been excluded from that conversation. Hence, representatives for these disempowered groups can turn to uncivil communication to get their message across.

This defense has been made recently in America by defenders of Black Lives Matter protests and defenders of Donald Trump’s campaign, among others. There are three versions of the defense. According to the first version, those who are trying to affect social change have already tried to communicate in culturally approved ways. Since they were rebuffed, tokenized, or ignored, they have no choice but to resort to uncivil actions. Incivility is admittedly less than ideal, but is justifiable as a last resort.

The second version of this defense frames the issue in terms of the disempowered having recourse to communicative means that would be morally off-limits for the powerful. Alinsky, for one, insists that the Have-nots and their allies can use tactics that are impermissible for the Haves. This is either because: (a) The Haves maintain power by systemic injustice, so actions taken to remedy that injustice are either just punishment on the Haves or a restoration of a just order to society, or (b) The power asymmetry between the Haves and Have-nots leads to a moral

asymmetry. The Have-nots are entitled to whatever means at their disposal to seize power. Just as we might believe that theft is wrong, but see Robin Hood as a hero for robbing from the rich to give to the poor, so we might regret uncivil communication, but admit that it can be done by or for the sake of the disenfranchised. Both versions of this defense have recently been adopted under the language of “punching up.”⁷⁴

The last version of this defense hinges on the notion that standards of what counts as “civility” within a society are themselves the product of unequal power relations. The standards of legitimate speech are set by (depending on who you ask) the patriarchy, the liberal media, the ruling class, the white majority, the establishment, or the elites. These groups’ selective insistence on civil speech and action should be viewed with suspicion since it is their way of maintaining power and discrediting those who oppose them. While the first two versions of this defense acknowledge that incivility is morally less than ideal, this defense rejects the very notion of civility as a mere tool of suppression.

4. The fourth and most trenchant objection is that there are some ethical issues on which we must not compromise, even in the minimal sense of compromise propounded by Civility advocates. According to Civility advocates, the cost of living together in a society is that we must be willing to assume good will in our opponents, must be willing to cooperate with them, and must be willing to listen to their criticisms of our views. There are some positions, however, which are beyond the pale. Randall Kennedy makes this point forcefully, “The people who marched under the banner of civility, the people who were the compromisers, the people who were afraid of being labeled as radicals and extremists, were the people who were willing to

⁷⁴ For a history of the idea of “punching up” in American comedy, see Ben Schwartz, “Knock Yourself Out,” *The Baffler* 31 (June, 2016), <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/knock-yourself-out-schwartz>.

allow slavery to continue.”⁷⁵ The abolition of slavery was more important than the need to keep alive a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect among American political leaders. For Kennedy, this is not an exception but approaches the rule. He writes, “Some might dismiss this comparison on the grounds that we simply do not face social cleavages with anything near the depth and ferocity as the conflict over slavery. But this misperceives the intensity of feelings underlying the various battles being waged over the country’s future.”⁷⁶ Across the political spectrum, people hold convictions that they deem, in DeMott’s words, “more important than civility.”

To this point, political analyst Vann Newkirk writes, “Civility is not the highest moral imperative—especially in response to perceived injustices—nor is hand-holding and guiding people to confront their bigotry gently. American history is full of fights, including the ongoing struggle for civil rights, that have been as fierce as they are ultimately effective. Civility is overrated.”⁷⁷ There are moral imperatives that trump civility, and to constrain oneself to respectful discourse, dialogue, and attempts to convince our opponents is to betray these values.

Recall Carter’s admission that playing by the rules of civility might mean one’s side might lose from time to time. Civility advocate Amitai Etzioni makes the same point, saying that conflicting parties should nevertheless fight “with one hand tied behind their back.”⁷⁸ This statement perfectly captures the main problem Victory finds with Civility. No one fights with one hand behind his back when it is a matter of life or death. The self-restraint Etzioni encourages may make sense when one is debating minor funding or zoning policies, but not

⁷⁵ Quoted in DeMott, “Seduced by Civility,” 16.

⁷⁶ Kennedy, “State of the Debate.”

⁷⁷ Vann Newkirk, “Sometimes There Are More Important Goals Than Civility,” *The Atlantic*, December 5, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/12/discussing-racism-white-voters/509528/>.

⁷⁸ Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 104.

when one is arguing over questions of survival and identity. Liberal *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow, writing in the wake of Donald Trump's inauguration, concludes his editorial,

This is why I have no patience for liberal talk of reaching out to Trump voters. There is no more a compromise point with those who accept, promote, and defend bigotry, misogyny, and xenophobia than there is a designation of 'almost pregnant.'

Trump is a cancer on this country and resistance is the remedy. The Trump phenomenon is devoid of compassion, and we must be closed to compromise. No one need try to convince me otherwise. The effort is futile; my conviction is absolute. This is a culture war in which truth is the weapon, righteousness the flag, and passion the fuel.

Fight, fight, fight. And when you are finished, fight some more. Victory is the only acceptable outcome when freedom, equality, and inclusion are at stake.⁷⁹

Blow might admit that this kind of demonization, refusal to cooperate, and dismissal of counterarguments are all dangerous attitudes in a democratic society. But he concludes that Trump's presidency is more dangerous. To listen respectfully and reason politely with Trump supporters is, in Blow's evaluation, already to cede too much ground to hatred.

Lest one conclude that the Victory perspective exists only the left, one can find numerous analogues on the right. For example, conservative radio host Steve Deace details a strategy for conservatives to win political power in his book *Rules for Patriots*. The book, which is endorsed by Donald Trump, is directly modeled after Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* and similarly appeals for devious tactics (albeit without Alinsky's puckishness). Deace concludes the book with a call to action typical of Victory,

American Exceptionalism, which gave birth to the greatest civilization in human history, has reached its tipping point.

Unsustainable debt, unprecedented growth of government, declining prestige in the world, surrender of the rule of law, demographic winter, and the loss of our

⁷⁹ Charles Blow, "The Death of Compassion," *The New York Times*, February 23, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/23/opinion/the-death-of-compassion.html>.

spiritual and moral heritage literally has the United States of America—as it’s been known since 1776—on the brink of extinction.

As G.K. Chesterton famously observed, the United States of America ‘is the only country ever founded on a creed.’ And the foundations of that creed—faith, family, and freedom—are on life support...

That’s why for those of us hoping to be here for at least another thirty years or so... we have to stop letting progressives get elected into office *by any lawful means necessary*.

The politics are polar opposites, but the conclusions are the same. Whether Charles Blow’s “freedom, equality, and inclusion” or Steve Deace’s “faith, family, and freedom,” there are some values so precious that they must be preserved at all costs. For Victory advocates of different political and religious affiliations, we are in the midst of a war in which our core values are at stake. The question of moral communication takes a back seat to the question, are we willing to do what it takes to win?

VIII. Comparing Civility and Victory

Two political scientists summarize many of these objections well, writing, “Overreliance on civility runs the risk of suppressing dissent, especially by those with limited access to power and resources... Overreliance on disruption, however, runs the risk of shutting down deliberation—and thus problem-solving—altogether.”⁸⁰ With these warnings in mind, I can now make a few concluding comparisons between the Victory and Civility stances.

1. Victory advocates stress the substance of the convictions in question, and insist that questions of respectful discourse are distractions from the main issue. On their reckoning, Civility advocates mistake the rind for the core. Civility advocates, on the other hand, argue that divided groups will not be able to work through these core issues until patterns of civil discourse

⁸⁰ Strachan and Wolf, “Calls for Civility,” 49.

are established. Only when we are able to work collaboratively—which takes attention to seemingly peripheral details—can we seek democratic solutions to these core problems.

People who share social locations and political convictions can still disagree along Civility-Victory lines. They can diagnose social problems the same way but propose different treatments. Consider the following example. Civility advocate Stephen Carter and Victory advocate Randall Kennedy—two black, liberal law professors at Ivy League schools—agree that racial inequality in America is a grave and persistent problem. Kennedy sees the problem as so momentous that we cannot become preoccupied with questions of etiquette but must rather demand solutions. We must prioritize justice over politeness. Carter, however, thinks Americans will not be able to come to shared conclusions about how to address racial inequality until we cultivate habits of respectful listening and persuasion. Lasting solutions to racial tensions require a discursive climate in which concerns can be raised, ideas can be tested, and people’s minds can be changed.⁸¹

Taking care of the smaller problems of name-calling, misrepresentation, and polarization, Carter says, makes possible lasting, substantive solutions to the bigger problems we face. Even if Kennedy granted this premise, he could still argue that communities suffering as a result of systemic injustice do not have the time to tend to discursive climates. Change the laws first, and then maybe we can think about how to change hearts and minds.

The dispute between Victory and Civility is thus often a dispute between short-term social change and long-term social change. This is of course complicated by the fact that long-

⁸¹ For a compelling argument about the morality of etiquette, see Amy Olberding, “Etiquette: A Confucian Contribution to Moral Philosophy,” *Ethics* 126 (January 2016): 422–46.

term social change often comes about as a result of short-term victories, as Victory advocates remind us. But Civility advocates are right to be wary of short-term victories that jeopardize the social climate and make social change more difficult overall. We can say, then, that one difference between these perspectives is that Victory wants to win the battle at all costs, knowing that a decisive battles can change the course of a war. Civility, however, wants to keep in mind that sometimes one can win the battle but sacrifice so much in the process that one loses the war.

2. Second, and related, Civility advocates tend to talk in terms of a *bipartisan standard of fairness*. If it is permissible for our side to shout down on-campus speakers from their side, then it must be permissible for their side to shout down our public figures. Victory advocates tend to frame issues in terms of a *nonpartisan standard of fairness*. If a speaker spews hatred without regard to the facts, then that speaker forfeits the right to be heard.

We have already encountered this point with Civility advocate Sidney Hook's discussion of the "logic of totalitarianism." Hook roots his case in an ethic deeper than mere playground fairness, indeed, for him it is part of the Golden Rule. For Hook, "treat others as you wish to be treated" means that each group should express its views only in ways that it would permit rival groups to express their views. Hook writes, "No matter how convinced we are as democrats that we are right, this does not give us a mandate to impose what is right on the general population. Deny this and we surrender to the logic of totalitarianism. This elementary truth has been persistently ignored, and sometimes contested, by student rebels. They seem to be unaware of the elitism behind their imperious political attitudes."⁸² In accusing the protestors of elitism, Hook is

⁸² *Academic Freedom and Academic Anarchy*, 113–14.

saying that these students credit rights to themselves that they refuse to extend to their interlocutors and in effect promote inequality.

If Victory advocates accept fairness as an ideal, they interpret it in a different way. Often they insist that the use of uncivil communication is fundamentally fair, and they provide two separate rationales. First, they insist that when participants engage in certain practices, they implicitly agree to responses of a particular sort. Take, for example, a prizefighter. He would object on moral grounds if a stranger walked up to him in a bookstore or at a barbecue and punched him in the face. But when he steps into the ring, he consents to the blows because they are part of the sport. Similarly, when a person runs for public office, she implicitly agrees to be the target of hostile, muckraking campaigns. This sort of thing is fair because everyone knows that it is how politics works; some incivility is, as it were, part of the sport. On this rationale, protestors accept that public figures on “their side” could also quite fairly be protested using the same means they are using.

The second and more common rationale hinges on an interpretation of the Golden Rule different from Hook’s. Put simply, it is fair to punish wrongdoers. We may not enjoy it, but we all agree that we ought to face the consequences of our actions. Consider, for example, a student disruptively protesting a speaker who advocates militant Communism. This student could respond to Hook’s criticism by saying, “I’m not being elitist. If I ever advocate a totalitarian ideology, I hope people would be there to shout me down.” This is the rationale used today by many anti-fascist protestors. They do not see “their side” as having rights that the “other side” lacks, rather they insist that *no one* has a right to espouse fascism and *everyone* has a right to silence fascists. To treat others as we wish to be treated, on this logic, does not exclude the possibility of obstructing them when they advocate injustice.

Recall, once again, that Civility and Victory are stances that individuals take up to consider certain cases, not moral philosophies that an individual holds across all cases. Hence, a person might believe there are two *legitimate* sides to one issue (even if only one side is *right*) and apply a bipartisan standard of fairness, and for another issue insist that there is only one legitimate perspective and apply a nonpartisan standard of fairness. One might, for example, strongly disagree with gun rights lobbyists and white supremacists, but maintain that a gun rights lobbyist has the right to be heard and debated while the white supremacist does not. Whether a person adopts a Civility or Victory approach to communication ethics often depends on whether one sees one's adversaries as wrong-but-legitimate or utterly beyond the pale. We will discuss this point in greater detail in the next chapter.

3. Third, the Victory and Civility standpoints share many of the same sources of ethical authority, but they rely on these in different ways. One of the curious facts about both Alinsky and Carter is that, despite their differences, they each make frequent appeals to democratic tradition and the Judeo-Christian tradition. Compare the following passages from Alinsky and Carter, respectively.

Believing in people, the radical has the job of organizing them so that they will have the power and opportunity to best meet each unforeseeable future crisis as they move ahead in their eternal search for those values of equality, justice, freedom, peace, a deep concern for the preciousness of human life, and all those rights and values propounded by Judeo-Christianity and the democratic political tradition.⁸³

The idea that we should use our freedom to the common good rather than to seek our own pleasures has long been at the center of Christian and Jewish ethics. On this point, at least, Augustine and Maimonides were in full agreement. It goes back at least to Aristotle and was central to the defense of human freedom by such enlightenment philosophers as John Locke.⁸⁴

⁸³ *Rules for Radicals*, 11–12. Cf. xxiv, 3, 22–23, 53; *Reveille for Radicals*, 71, 208–09.

⁸⁴ *Civility*, 17.

The important contrast to note about these two representative passages is that Alinsky appeals to Judeo-Christian and democratic *values*, while Carter appeals to what these traditions insist we “should” do, that is, Judeo-Christian and democratic *practices*. For Alinsky, these traditions’ normative influence comes through the ideals they espouse. For Carter, their normative influence comes through the actions they enjoin.

This difference comes into relief when we look at the ways representatives of the two standpoints talk about democracy. Victory advocates, committed to an ethics of ends, emphasize democratic values. In *Reveille for Radicals*, Alinsky approvingly quotes historian Vernon Parrington, “The humanitarian idealism of the Declaration [of Independence] has always echoed as a battle-cry in the hearts of those who dream of an America dedicated to democratic ends.”⁸⁵ This dream of democratic ends constitutes the way Alinsky interprets the moral legacy of America’s founding. For Alinsky, to believe in democracy is to strive for the ideals of independence and equality.⁸⁶

Civility advocates, committed to a morality of means, emphasizes democratic practices. No one expresses this more clearly than Sidney Hook. “In a democracy,” Hook writes, “no matter what our political faith or beliefs may be, so long as we sincerely accept the basic rules of the game, so long as we are willing to abide by the consequences of the free give-and-take of critical debate, we may legitimately hold and practice any notion or doctrine we please.”⁸⁷ For

⁸⁵ Quoted in *Reveille for Radicals*, 208.

⁸⁶ Cf. DeMott, “Seduced by Civility,” 19.

⁸⁷ Sidney Hook, “The Philosophical Heritage of Atlantic Democracies,” in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom*, eds. Robert B. Talisse and Robert Tempio (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 263. The editors write, “Hook maintains that the essential feature of a democratic community is its commitment to the methods and processes of experimentalism rather than its commitment to any specific principles derived therefrom.” “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom*, 19.

Hook, to believe in democracy is to engage in “democratic processes”⁸⁸ of civil discussion, respectful disagreement, and tolerating other cultures and opinions.

Both standpoints agree on the ethical significance of democracy, but they differ in how they understand democracy. Civility focuses on means, Victory focuses on ends. The same pattern holds for the ways they interpret religious traditions.⁸⁹ They differ not so much in the sources of their ethical commitments but in the shape of their ethical logics.

This, in conclusion, is why the debate between these two standpoints seems interminable. The debate is not readily resolved even if people share the same goals, standards, and authorities. Two people can agree on the social change they hope to see, can agree on the importance of fairness and the Golden Rule, and can agree on the same sources of ethical norms, and yet still arrive at opposing conclusions on the ethical status of a particular symbolic action.

⁸⁸ “The Philosophical Heritage of Atlantic Democracies,” 266. Cf. “The Democratic Way of Life” in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom*.

⁸⁹ Drawing on Richard Hays’s typology, we can say that Victory emphasizes biblical principles whereas Civility emphasizes biblical rules and commands. See *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 293.

2. The Rules Are Broken: Dilemmas of Restraint in War and Social Conflict

“The diversity of the limitations to which men are subject creates the illusion that there are different species among them which cannot communicate with one another. Only he who knows the empire of might and knows how not to respect it is capable of love and justice.” –Simone Weil¹

This chapter continues our discussion of the relationship between Civility, Victory, and Open-mindedness. All three moral logics are prevalent in considerations of the ethics of communication for social change, but not in equal measure. If asked, most people would reply that they have the strongest affinity with Civility. That is, most people believe that there are moral limits that ought to guide and constrain our communication. People generally affirm that deception, manipulation, indoctrination, slander, dismissiveness, silencing others, and propaganda are morally wrong, and that listening, respect, constructive criticism, dialogue, charitable interpretation, and tact are morally right. By and large, there is widespread agreement on the norms that govern communication. Why, then, is there so much incivility, and what can be done to address it?

As previously mentioned, it is not usually the case that a person adheres to one of the three moral logics consistently across all contexts. Rather, individuals hold all three voices within themselves, and each one holds court in different circumstances. At risk of oversimplifying the complexities of moral psychology, we might say that in twenty-first century America, a typical person’s *de facto* ethics of communication is as follows:

- 1) When the issues at stake are seen as subjective, as relatively inconsequential, or as matters of cultural or personal identity, the Open-mindedness perspective holds sway.

¹ “The Iliad, or a Poem of Might” in *The Simone Weil Reader* (Mt. Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell Limited), 181.

People are expected to be tolerant of others' beliefs and practices and to refrain from imposing their commitments on others.²

- 2) When the issues at stake are seen as matters of objective truth that can be discerned through deliberation, the Civility perspective holds sway. People are expected to listen, to make arguments, and to treat their interlocutors respectfully while criticizing their ideas.
- 3) When the issues at stake are seen as deeply-held values, matters of life and death, or the necessary conditions for a just order, the Victory perspective holds sway. People are willing to justify incivilities if they are deemed necessary for the sake of their goals.

In this chapter, I will focus on the interplay between the Civility and Victory perspectives within an individual, specifically the often undetected transition from regulating oneself by the logic of Civility to justifying one's actions with the logic of Victory. By studying the effects of conflict on morality, we can better understand how people committed to civility nonetheless tend to stray from this commitment—or abandon it altogether—in social conflict.

Section I introduces the concept of “prescriptive proceduralism,” the dominant rhetorical style used by Civility advocates and communication scholars to promote moral communication. Prescriptive proceduralism consists of giving moral injunctions and rules that govern communication for social change, irrespective of the communicator's goals. In Section II, I argue that prescriptive proceduralism has limitations that prevent it from adequately restraining immoral conduct in social conflicts. People by and large already know the rules of moral communication and believe in these rules, but they will either bend the rules to suit their purposes or justify breaking the rules to attain their ends. Propounding these rules is thereby

² It may go without saying, but religion is often placed in this category.

unlikely to accomplish much, given that people already agree on them. Examining how this happens might help us re-evaluate whether rules and injunctions are the best form of communication ethics advocacy. To that end, in Section III, I draw parallels between the three voices in the ethics of communication and three positions on the ethics of war. Civility, I argue, operates for social conflict in much the same way as the *jus in bello* criteria of just-war theory operate for military conflict. In both cases, there are rules that should in theory govern behavior in the conflict, and opposing sides may agree on these rules, but the rules become distorted, ignored, or overridden in the heat of struggle. Section IV, continuing this analysis, surveys arguments for why just-war criteria are largely ineffective when it comes to actually restraining immoralities in war. Sections V and VI complete this analogy by explaining how social conflicts (for example, the cluster of moral, religious, and political disagreements that make up the American “culture war”) share key features with military conflicts.³ The reasons why the rules of war often fail to restrain immoralities are, I argue, the same as the reasons why the rules of communication often fail to restrain incivility. Gaining clarity on how this happens should guide communication ethicists toward a different rhetorical approach for advocating moral communication. Finally, in Section VII, I reconsider the limits and possibilities of prescriptive proceduralism, before developing an alternative model of communication criticism in subsequent chapters.

I. Prescriptive Proceduralism

³ In conflict theory and social psychology, conflict exists at different levels: interpersonal (micro), intergroup (meso), international (macro), and between civilizations or regions (mega). In this chapter, I will trace isomorphisms between military conflict (at the macro and mega levels) and social conflict (at the micro and meso levels). For these categories, see (inter alia) *Johan Galtung: Pioneer of Peace Research*, eds. Johan Galtung and Derek Fischer (Berlin: Springer, 2013), 139.

Civility advocates take a procedural approach to communication ethics. They articulate moral guidelines for discussion so that participants with diverse ethical standpoints can engage each other critically but civilly. These advocates frequently write lists of ground rules that all communicators ought to follow. Carter lists fifteen rules, Hook lists ten,⁴ Jordan lists two,⁵ Etzioni lists seven,⁶ Deborah Tannen lists five,⁷ Millard Erickson lists eleven,⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh lists four,⁹ and P.M. Forni lists twenty-five. Even when Civility advocates do not make lists, their writings often take the form of moral injunctions that do not make any reference to speakers' goals. The following paragraph from Forni illustrates this tendency:

Should you need to cope with conflict, do so in a fair fashion. You owe it to yourself as much as your opponents. Never utter unkind words regarding their identity (racial, national, sexual, or otherwise) and other aspects of their personal life that are essentially irrelevant to the contested issues at hand. Instead of looking for any vulnerable areas to attack in a strategy of overkill, try to address directly the substance of the issues. Throughout the confrontation never lose sight of the humanity of your opponents. Resist the temptation to think of them as faceless, nameless representatives of the "wrong side." No matter how much you happen to disagree with their ideas or positions, never cease to feel that they are entitled to at least a modicum of sympathetic understanding.¹⁰

This style of writing ethics is what I call "prescriptive proceduralism." It is prescriptive in that it consists of giving moral instructions for what speakers ought to do, and it is proceduralism in its focus on means, largely irrespective of ends.

⁴ "The Ethics of Controversy" in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom*, 294–95. Cf. Johannesen, *Ethics of Human Communication*, 27.

⁵ Jordan, "The Virtue of Civility."

⁶ Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, 104–06.

⁷ Tannen, *The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue* (New York: Random House, 1998), 288.

⁸ "Toward Convictional Civility," in *Convictional Civility*, eds. C. Ben Mitchell, Carla D. Sanderson, Gregory Alan Thornbury (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 26–33.

⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Art of Communicating* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), 53. As previously mentioned, Thich Nhat Hanh represents both the Civility perspective and the Open-mindedness perspective at different times.

¹⁰ Forni, *Choosing Civility*, 61–62.

Prescriptive proceduralism is the dominant style for Civility advocacy, and it is also a pervasive tendency in communication ethics as an academic discipline. We could discuss examples *ad nauseum*, but the work of distilling the field has already been done by prominent communication ethicist Richard Johannesen. He writes, “Traditional American textbook discussions of the ethics of persuasion, communication, and argument often include lists of standards suggested for evaluating the ethicality of an instance of persuasion.” Johannesen synthesizes these lists into a compilation of eleven frequently-prescribed rules for ethical persuasion, which he calls the “ethical criteria for persuasion,”¹¹ and these are representative not only of the ethical content of the literature but also its rhetorical form.

These textbook treatments follow in the footsteps of early classics of communication ethics.¹² Karl Wallace’s oft-assigned 1955 article “An Ethical Basis of Communication,” for one, relies on prescriptive proceduralism to make its point. Wallace writes, “Ethical standards of communication should place emphasis upon the means used to secure the end, rather than upon achieving the end itself.” These standards, according to Wallace, are implicitly known by many and formulated explicitly by teachers and experts in communication. “It seems clear,” Wallace writes, “that the ethical standards of communication should be set by those who know communication best, and that the standards or code they formulate will express their judgment as to what means are good, what means are bad. If the standards are clearly stated and widely understood, they could be freely used by expert and layman alike to measure the character of any case of communication.”¹³ Drawing on democracy as his source of ethical authority, Wallace

¹¹ Johannesen, *Ethics of Human Communication*, 28–9.

¹² Johannesen identifies Wallace, Franklyn Haiman, and Thomas Nilsen as the three founders of communication ethics. We will be discussing all three in this chapter. See *Exploring Communication Ethics*, eds. Ron Arnett and Pat Arneson (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 38–39.

¹³ Karl Wallace, “An Ethical Basis for Communication,” *The Speech Teacher* 4, no. 1 (January, 1955): 2, 4.

then outlines four criteria for ethical communication in the same vein as popular Civility authors.¹⁴

Though communication ethics is a rich and diverse discipline that has grown significantly in the decades since Wallace's article, four aspects of Wallace's approach are still pervasive in the field:

- (1) The *cognitive* aspect: The assumption that clarifying and popularizing moral norms is the most pressing task for theorists hoping to facilitate moral communication.
- (2) The *external* aspect: The assumption that the theorist can set down criteria for speech that all reasonable people can impartially apply, either to their own speech or in evaluating a piece of communication.
- (3) The *prescriptive* aspect: Ethical prescriptions, often in the form of a list of rules or a litany of injunctions, which readers should abide by whatever their communicative goals may be.
- (4) The *procedural* aspect: A focus on means, largely irrespective of ends.

These, taken together, characterize prescriptive proceduralism as a mode of doing communication ethics. Not all communication ethics is written in this mode, but as I will argue, the prevalence of prescriptive proceduralism in communication ethics contributes to the comparative weakness of the field.

II. The Weakness of Communication Ethics

¹⁴ "An Ethical Basis for Communication," 6–9.

Henry Johnstone, longtime editor of the journal *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, once reflected on the submissions he received about communication ethics. Upon reading them, he was “usually ready to weep. Such unfulfilled promise!”¹⁵ Johnstone was writing in 1981, and since then more creative work has been done in communication ethics which bucks the trend.¹⁶ But I argue that, then and now, prescriptive proceduralism hinders communication ethics as a discipline from fulfilling its potential. Communication ethics as a field suffers from superficiality; the field is too dependent on nostrums that fail to address the crux of the moral dilemmas people face. Too many essays and chapters could be summarized, “Just be more dialogical! Just act respectfully! Just listen better!”

Put differently, communication ethicists insightfully diagnose what is wrong with unethical discourse, and helpfully envision ideal communicative encounters. But to the degree that they depend on prescriptive proceduralism to get from here to there, they mitigate the power of their ideas to change how people actually behave. Maurice Friedman says, “All sorts of people talk about dialogue, but the way is there in order that you may walk on it, as Buber said. That is the really hard thing to do.”¹⁷ The challenge for communication ethicists is to go from talking about dialogue to helping their audiences walk the difficult and demanding path to dialogue.

Civility authors agree that calls for civility are on the rise, but incivility is on the rise at the same time. There is some uncertainty even among them, then, about the effectiveness of calls

¹⁵ Johnstone, “Toward an Ethics of Rhetoric,” *Communication* 6 (1981): 305. Elmer Thiessen writes, “I found the literature in this broad field of communication ethics to be disappointing.” *The Ethics of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 240.

¹⁶ For an introduction to some of the more innovative figures in communication ethics, see the interviews in Arnett and Arneson’s *Exploring Communication Ethics* (2007), as well as Arnett and Arneson’s own writings.

¹⁷ Maurice Friedman, quoted by Mark Lawrence McPhail in “Race and the (Im)possibility of Dialogue,” *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, eds. Rob Anderson, Leslie Baxter, and Ken Cissna (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), 216.

for civility. Even if the prescriptions are morally right, are they rhetorically effective? Does telling people to be civil make them more civil? Is it the case, as Wallace believes, that if communication ethics rules are “clearly stated and widely understood,” the discursive climate would improve? Does making people aware of the rules of moral communication make them more likely to follow these rules? Victory advocates point out the hypocrisy of public figures who call for civility and conclude that the answer to these questions is no. More charitably, we can at least conclude that these calls do not influence behavior as much as Civility advocates hope. We can identify factors that mitigate the effectiveness of prescriptive proceduralist calls for civility and respect, and consider whether a different approach to communication ethics advocacy might be more effective.

My arguments here, it should be noted, do not pertain primarily to the ethical content of the prescriptions (people should listen attentively, treat others courteously, and so on) but rather with the mode in which they are presented, specifically the degree to which that mode of presentation actually facilitates moral communication. This chapter is an analysis of the rhetoric of communication ethics and Civility advocacy, using insights from moral psychology and comparisons with other ethical issues to ask how these discourses can be more effective in facilitating moral communication. As Terry Eagleton defines it, rhetoric is “the process of analyzing the material effects of particular uses of language in particular social conjunctures.”¹⁸ It is the rhetoric of prescriptive proceduralism, not the content of actual codes for moral behavior, that I am arguing has serious limitations in situations of social conflict. My argument in this chapter is simply that if one is interested in changing people’s communicative behavior, as

¹⁸ Terry Eagleton, quoted in James Arnt Aune, “Cultures of Discourse: Marxism and Rhetorical Theory,” in *Argumentation Theory and the Rhetoric of Assent*, eds. David Cratis Williams and Michael David Hazen (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 164.

Civility advocates and communication ethicists typically are, then one ought to pay attention to *why* it is people act the way they do. If we do that, we can see how prescriptive proceduralist ethics are frequently inadequate to the task of restraining immorality. This inadequacy is due, I will show, in part to the essential characteristics of prescriptive proceduralism: its cognitive aspect lends itself to moral disengagement, its external status lends itself to *de facto* dismissal, its status as rules and injunctions lends itself to biased interpretation, and its status as means-focused morality lends itself to being overridden for the sake of values, survival, and the restoration of justice.¹⁹

I should be clear at the outset that I am not claiming that the rules are to blame for people breaking them. Nor am I claiming that there exists a form of advocacy for communication ethics that guarantees its audiences will communicate more morally. As Aristotle said, rhetoric is like medicine—the merit of the treatment cannot be measured strictly by its effectiveness in a particular case, but by whether it accomplishes as much as could be accomplished. Prescriptive proceduralism, as a rhetorical style for promoting communication ethics, has serious shortcomings. Considering how it falls short of what could be accomplished will point the way toward a better treatment for immoral speech in social conflicts.

Finally, as I will address in detail in Section VII, there are certain “social conjunctures” in which prescriptive proceduralism can be beneficial. Extending the medical metaphor, there are some ailments for which prescriptive proceduralist ethics can be a fitting treatment. The main argument of this chapter is that any attempt to treat the problem of immoral communication has to take into account the nature of the disease, and that in conflict situations the factors that lead

¹⁹ As noted in chapter 1, I am using the category “ethics” to include values, morals, and the relationship between them.

to disrespect, deception, dismissal, and so on are only superficially remedied by the persuasive efforts of Civility advocates and communication ethicists.

II.A. Four Limitations

There are four limitations to prescriptive proceduralism, which correspond to the four aspects of prescriptive proceduralism listed above—cognitive, external, prescriptive, and procedural. All four limitations pertain, not to the ethical content per se, but to the capacity for prescriptive procedural communication ethics to restrain immoral communication and encourage moral communication. We will revisit these four limitations in Section V.

The first limitation has to do with the *cognitive* aspect of prescriptive proceduralism. Consciously acknowledging and agreeing to rules is meaningless unless one applies these rules to one's own actions, and this can be a fraught process given how unreflective much of our communication is. This disconnect can be seen whenever people who advocate civility nonetheless act in uncivil ways and justify their doing so. If rules are to effectively restrain immoral actions, the rules cannot merely be understood and agreed upon, but must be applied by individuals to their own activity. This is an obstacle for all rule-based ethics, but is especially salient for communication, in part because humans communicate so regularly. We might expect someone to think through a checklist of moral rules when deciding whether or not to euthanize a terminally ill patient. But people who communicate for hours every day cannot reasonably be expected to keep all twenty-five of Forni's rules in mind at all times.

The second limitation has to do with the *external* nature of prescriptive proceduralism, specifically with authority of the one interpreting the prescriptions. People committed to respectful discourse might nonetheless reject the interpretations others give of what respect looks

like in their particular situation. People engaged in a conflict tend to create a dichotomy between those who *understand the conflict and what it demands*, on the one hand, and those who are seen as *outsiders to the conflict who do not realize its severity*, on the other. Even if an outsider has impressive credentials, or might have legitimate claim to be an insider, it is easy to discount their moralizing as based on a shallow understanding of what is at stake in the conflict. Hence Wallace's contention that communication scholars can authoritatively explicate the rules of moral communication is one that is not widely held, especially by participants in conflicts. The authority of the moral criteria is undermined in conflicts because it is presented by someone deemed outside the conflict (or an opponent) or because it is taken to be applicable to other conflicts but not this one.²⁰

Historian Howard Zinn exemplifies this tendency. Responding to a pamphlet in which Supreme Court Justice Abraham Fortas outlines moral rules for civil disobedience, Zinn writes, "For the crisis of our time, the slow workings of American reform, the limitations on protest and disobedience and innovation set by liberals like Justice Fortas, are simply not adequate."²¹ Zinn argues that the norms that have governed efforts at social change in the past are not suitable to the demands of the present social crisis. Though Zinn says he favors the "ordinary channels" of political reform, he deems them insufficient for the current struggles for racial equality, anti-war policy, and economic justice. Justice Fortas, as someone removed from this struggle, is not deemed a credible authority on what methods are proportionate to the evils faced by activists. Later in the book Zinn goes even further, arguing that the Supreme Court is part of the

²⁰ On parties' unwillingness to heed criticism from outgroup members, see Matthew J. Hornsey and Armin Imani, "Criticizing Groups from the Inside and the Outside: An Identity Perspective on the Intergroup Sensitivity Effect," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 30, no. 3 (2004).

²¹ Howard Zinn, *Disobedience and Democracy: Nine Fallacies on Law and Order* (New York: Random House, 1968), 7.

government against which Zinn and his fellow activists are protesting, and thus Fortas should not be treated as a referee in the conflict but as an opponent.²²

Zinn's arguments echo Martin Luther King's point in "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" that white liberals who do not suffer from racial injustice are not in a good epistemic position to evaluate which actions constitute moral responses to that injustice.²³ In fact, as beneficiaries of racism, their own interests may hinder their ability to judge wisely in this conflict. For every Zinn or King who offers nuanced responses to external critics, there are thousands of activists who dismiss external critics completely, either as incapable of understanding what the conflict demands or as *de facto* opponents of the desired social change. Since each conflict is different, the reasoning goes, authority derives from familiarity with *this specific conflict* rather than any other credentials. And since impartiality is impossible in this conflict, every attempt to prescribe and proscribe actions is done by partisans in the conflict, not impartial judges. Prescriptive procedural rules, even when their moral status is acknowledged, are not deemed binding but are interpreted as irrelevant and outdated or as attempts to preserve the status quo.

A third limitation has to do with the *prescriptive* aspect of prescriptive proceduralism, and it stems from the interpretive flexibility of communicative rules and communicative acts. To say that a symbolic action does not abide by the standards of civility, one needs to conduct two interpretations—first, of the rules proffered by the theorist, and second, of the symbolic action itself. Ambiguities in either can easily be exploited; groups can interpret the rules permissively

²² Zinn, *Disobedience and Democracy*, 30, 90ff. Zinn writes also of Fortas's "nationalist bias" clouding his moral judgment. Cf. 88.

²³ Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 298. King is not claiming, as is sometimes asserted, that white liberals cannot criticize the actions of black activists. Rather, after noting the inadequacy of the responses by many white liberals, King points out that their social situation puts them in a position from which it is difficult to judge rightly about the morality of civil rights protests.

for their own communication and restrictively for their opponents' communication. Ambiguity is a difficulty for all ethical rules, but it especially salient for communication ethics because speech can be variously interpreted. As Thomas Sugrue says, "civility is in the eye of the beholder,"²⁴ and the line between respectful and disrespectful discourse is blurrier than, say, the line between fidelity and adultery. People, of course, do rationalize and justify adulterous behavior; my point is simply that communication is so ambiguous that it is difficult even for impartial judges to determine when infractions occur and much more difficult for partisans to evaluate and modify their own speech in accordance with the rules.

A fourth limitation of prescriptive proceduralism is that the *procedural* focus on means does not reach the heart of the problem. When people perceive certain communicative means to be the only way to achieve their goals, telling them to refrain from those means is tantamount to telling them to abandon their goals. A parallel point can be found in the New Testament, "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?"²⁵ Similarly, if we tell people, "do not manipulate others, do not use stereotypes, do not silence others," but fail to address the rhetorical needs these actions seemingly meet, it is unlikely our exhortations will help anyone communicate morally. People resort to immoral communication methods because they feel they need to, that is, because these means seem like the only way to attain their goals. To convince them to adopt different means, we may need to address the connection between these means and the ends that motivate their speech. This will be

²⁴ Sugrue, "Civil Rights, Civility, and Disruption," 28.

²⁵ James 2:15-6 (NIV).

our task in subsequent chapters, but first we need to delve deeper into the moral psychology of conflict.

III. Rules of Engagement

To better understand the limitations of prescriptive proceduralism, we will focus for the rest of this chapter on parallels between communication ethics and the ethics of war. These parallels are not totally foreign to communication ethics; indeed, war metaphors are omnipresent in the discourse of Civility, Victory, and Open-mindedness authors.²⁶ Many Civility advocates use the phrase “rules of engagement”²⁷ to characterize their ethical projects, making an analogy between the norms that govern military conflicts and the norms that govern social conflicts. Senator Orrin Hatch even titled his plea for civility “Geneva Conventions for the Culture War.”²⁸ Tellingly, Alinsky does not believe that there can be such rules or conventions. Describing his struggles for social justice as wars, he writes, “A war is not an intellectual debate, and in the war against social evils there are no rules of fair play. In this sense all wars are the same.”²⁹

These are not mere turns of phrase. The moral logics of the Victory, Open-mindedness, and Civility positions have close parallels with some of the major positions in the ethics of war:

²⁶ On the prevalence of these metaphors, see chapter 1 of Tannen’s *The Argument Culture*. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have shown, war metaphors are prevalent in many areas of discourse, so we must not read too much into any one instance of martial language. See *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). But these metaphors, I argue, are significant when it comes to the political, ethical, and cultural debates that make up the “culture war.” On why “war” is an appropriate metaphor for political conflict in modern America, see James Davison Hunter, “The Enduring Culture War” in *Is There a Culture War?* eds. James Davison Hunter and Alan Wolfe (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2006), 35.

²⁷ Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, 104, 110–11; Forni, *Choosing Civility*, 157. Political strategist Karl Rove uses the same term to discuss civility; see Judith Rodin and Stephen P. Steinberg, eds. *Public Discourse in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 6. Michael Walzer makes the same comparison in “Civility and Civic Virtue in Contemporary America” *Social Research* 41, no. 1 (1974): 610.

²⁸ Orrin G. Hatch, “Geneva Conventions for the Culture War,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/geneva-conventions-for-the-culture-war-1532729748>.

²⁹ *Reveille for Radicals*, 154.

realism/crusaderism, nonresistant pacifism, and just-war theory, respectively. Understanding these parallels will help us understand in greater detail the three perspectives on communication ethics, and pave the way for an alternative to prescriptive proceduralism.

III.A. Realism/Crusaderism and Victory

Realism, when used with regard to the ethics of war, refers to an ethical position in which a nation's purpose in war is solely to defend or further its national interests. Crusaderism is the view according to which a certain cause is so righteous that it can be pursued by any means necessary. These two positions differ, but in one respect amount to the same thing. Both maintain that in war the ends justify the means. Warfare can be restrained only by strategic logic and not moral logic. Both crusaders and realists thus appeal to a necessity that precludes any attempt to apply moral rules to warfare.³⁰ For crusaders there is a transcendent being or value that justifies this kind of warfare, while for realists the needs and interests of a group may be sufficient to justify this kind of warfare.³¹ Insofar as the needs and interests of a group are invested with transcendent qualities, the line between realism and crusaderism becomes difficult to draw.

As Alinsky himself acknowledges, the Victory approach to social conflict shares an ethical logic with realism/crusaderism. We can hear parallels between Alinsky's willingness to resort to extremes lest "40,000 poor would lose their war against hopelessness and despair" and the justifications given for extreme measures in wartime rhetoric. It must be reiterated that

³⁰ This does not mean that hardline realists permit anything in war. Rather, they permit anything that advances their side's strategic interests. Only when there is no strategic advantage to be gained by the action does the question of morality enter into the discussion. On this reasoning, a realist can judge a particular massacre as immoral while maintaining that saturation bombing of cities is necessary or at least permissible.

³¹ One does not need explicitly religious commitments to justify crusaderism. John Howard Yoder writes, "The 'survival of the free world' or the 'liberation of the proletariat' can constitute transcendent-cause claims that are not subject to political measurement, so that the 'holy [war]' mentality is still at work." *When War Is Unjust* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 14.

realism is not “anything goes” moral relativism; rather it is a belief that the demands of a particular situation or the rectitude of a particular cause can override the norms that govern everyday life. If we are at war, then we are no longer bound by morality but compelled by necessity. Our ordinary prohibitions against killing do not apply in the context of war. Similarly, for Alinsky, the ordinary norms of politeness and respect do not apply in the “war against social evils.” This is the main argument of *Rules for Radicals*, which is subtitled, “A Primer for *Realistic Radicals*” (emphasis mine).

III.B. Nonresistant Pacifism and Open-mindedness

Nonresistant pacifism is the ethical position that intergroup conflict is intrinsically wrong and we should thus avoid war at all costs.³² It is driven by a vision of harmonious co-existence between people groups. Nonresistant pacifists emphasize common humanity over against national, ethnic, and ideological divisions. They eschew coercion, offense, and top-down social change, opting instead to cultivate tolerance, compassion, and local communities of mutual support. This entails withdrawing from social structures that perpetuate violence, and investing instead in education, relationship-building, and self-understanding. This variety of pacifism differs from others in its antipathy to the use of political power even for seemingly good ends.

Likewise, Open-mindedness is characterized by its tendency to avoid or prevent conflict rather than face it. It is a refusal to participate in argumentative battles between activists, a rejection of the felt need to take sides. By repudiating efforts to conquer and convert, Open-mindedness advocates seek to create safe havens from the oppressive forces of society. This does

³² I have called this “nonresistant pacifism” to differentiate it from nonviolent direct action and other forms of pacifism. Like realism and most -isms, it is an ideal type, though this position is often associated with Leo Tolstoy. See Colm McKeogh, *Tolstoy’s Pacifism* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009). For a summary of different rationales for pacifism, see John Howard Yoder’s *Nevertheless: Varieties of Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992).

not mean Open-mindedness advocates wish to have no social impact; they believe that withdrawing support from these divisive forces diminishes these forces' power over our co-existence.³³ Like Tolstoy's vision of non-violent communities, Open-mindedness advocates seek to create dialogical, nurturing spaces free from persuasion.

III.C. Just-War Theory and Civility

Just-war theory traditionally has two facets: *jus ad bellum*, which are a set of ethical criteria governing the decision to go to war, and *jus in bello*, which are ethical criteria governing the means one uses in fighting a war. For the rest of this chapter, I will focus on the rules of *jus in bello* and the similarities they share with the rules of engagement proposed by Civility advocates. These *jus in bello* rules have been formulated differently by theorists over the centuries, but the typical list involves:

- (1) Discrimination: In war, one must distinguish between legitimate military targets and non-combatants, and only attack the former. Hence, one may not shoot civilians or execute prisoners of war.
- (2) Proportionality: The harm caused must not be excessive, and collateral damage must be minimized. Hence, one must refrain from using weapons that, regardless of the immediate target, result in a catastrophic civilian death toll.
- (3) Humanity: The means used in warfare must not be cruel, but must respect the dignity of the adversary. Hence, one may not use torture or rape as instruments of war.
- (4) Honesty: One must abide by truces and bargains, and respect treaties and international law. Hence, signatories of the Geneva Protocol may not use chemical weapons in war.

³³ Foss, Foss, and Griffin, *Feminist Rhetorical Theories*, 269.

For just-war theorists, these rules govern the means for conducting warfare, and are morally binding on all parties in all military conflicts. They are meant to guide commanders and soldiers in fighting a just war, and they also serve as criteria by which civilians can evaluate the morality of military actions.

Modern just-war theory is a river fed by two streams: first, the classical just-war tradition shaped by centuries of Christian theologians, and second, the insights that have gone into the development of international law.³⁴ In keeping with this dual inheritance, just-war theorists ground their criteria by appealing either to timeless, often religious, moral norms or to the pragmatic requirements of a sustainable, relative peace between states.

These two sites of justification for just-war theory parallel the transcendent and democratic justifications given by Civility advocates. Like just-war theory, Civility advocates position themselves between inaction on the one hand and unrestrained action on the other. They seek to promote a principled, restrained, rule-governed way of engaging in social conflict and sustaining social harmony. Most significantly for our purposes, in ethicist Jean Bethke Elshtain's phrase, just-war theory is a "cluster of injunctions: what it is permissible to do, what it is not permissible to do."³⁵ The same is true of Civility advocacy and much of the scholarly writing on communication ethics, which take the form of prescriptive proceduralism. Thus, whatever differences they may have in content, popular and academic writings on the ethics of communication tend to share a rhetorical form with *jus in bello* norms.

³⁴ The just-war tradition has been shaped by Christian theologians, but draws on non-Christian resources (notably Cicero) and shares parallels with strands of thought in other religious traditions. See, for example, John Kelsay's *Arguing the Just War in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2007).

³⁵ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Power Trips and Other Journeys* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1990), 157.

As previously stated, there are parallels between social conflicts and military conflicts, and understanding efforts to restrain immorality in military conflicts helps us understand efforts to restrain immorality in social conflicts. Since communicative acts are typically more ambiguous and contestable than military actions, discrepancies between stated commitments and actual behavior in social conflicts can be difficult to demonstrate. With the benefit of hindsight, military history provides comparatively clearer examples of human behavior in conflict settings. These martial episodes, with the added advantage of good extant scholarly commentary, illustrate in stark relief the difficulties of effectively holding people to moral standards in the heat of conflict. In the next section, I will discuss the factors that mitigate the effectiveness of just-war criteria to check immorality in wartime, before arguing in subsequent sections that these same factors obtain in social conflicts.

IV. Loosening Restraints

Just-war theory can be evaluated from two different angles. The first is the question, is it ethical? Does a particular formulation of the theory correctly exclude unjust behaviors and promote just behaviors, given the nature of warfare in its era? The second question is, is it effective? Does championing just-war theory actually work to restrain unjust wartime practices? The principal historian of the just-war tradition, James Turner Johnson, remarks that any version of the theory “must be judged in terms of whether it was the best the civilization that produced it could do in its understanding of its own ideals, in comprehending the realities of its own political and military structures: along with this, it must be judged in terms of whether it produced workable restraints on war.” Much has been written judging the ethical merits of the theory, for

the rest of this section we will discuss exclusively its effectiveness as a moral restraint. Does just-war theory, in Johnson's terms, "actually work to restrain the ravages of war?"³⁶

A full-scale evaluation of the effectiveness of just-war theories is well beyond the scope of this chapter, but my thesis in this section is that just-war theories do restrain war to some degree, but their ability to do so is hampered significantly by the form their moral requirements take. There is good reason to believe that just-war rhetoric can even be counter-productive, facilitating unjust fighting rather than restraining it.³⁷ Analyzing why this is the case will shed light on the weaknesses of prescriptive proceduralism and, in turn, why an increase in calls for civility might not stem the rising tide of incivility. The guiding question in this chapter is whether increased awareness and acceptance of the rules that govern ideal communication actually leads to more ethical communication. To the extent that it does not, why not, and what can be done instead?

"In real historical experience," John Howard Yoder writes, "effective adherence to the restraints of the just-war tradition has been and is a rarity."³⁸ Yoder writes as a sympathetic critic of the tradition, and just-war theorists generally agree with this historical evaluation. Even the modern war that is most frequently cited as fulfilling the *jus ad bellum* criteria—the Allied fight against the Nazis in World War II—saw terrible transgressions of *jus in bello* criteria. This overall lack of success in shaping policy is not, in and of itself, a mark against of just-war ideas. Many ethical theories are not widely known enough to have made a clear impact on public

³⁶ James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1981), 150.

³⁷ Some just-war theorists recognize this problem and attempt to reframe the idea of a just war with greater sensitivity to moral psychology. See, for example, Daniel M. Bell, *Just War as Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), to which I will return later in this chapter. It should also be noted that I am focusing specifically on the actions approved of and the justifications given by military leaders, politicians, and commentators more so than by enlisted soldiers.

³⁸ *When War Is Unjust*, 6.

behavior. But in America, the language of a “just war” is regularly invoked by politicians and military leaders, and many of the violations of *jus in bello* criteria are justified by people who claim to adhere to some form of just-war theory.³⁹ Americans profess to abide by just-war standards, or at least want to abide by them, yet Americans consistently support and defend leaders who deviate from them.

For critics, this is a problem *with* just-war theory; for just-war theorists, it is a problem *for* just-war theory. But this combination of widespread acknowledgment of the imperatives of justice with continued justifications for unjust tactics is certainly a problem. Regardless of the ethical rightness of just-war ideas, they have not had much success at restraining behavior. In his essay on “The Triumph of Just War Theory,” the influential theorist Michael Walzer contests this, making a case for the current effectiveness of just-war theory in restraining warfare. He concludes,

Perhaps naïvely, I am inclined to say that justice has become, in all Western countries, one of the tests that any proposed military strategy or tactic has to meet—only one of the tests and not the most important one, but this still gives just war theory a place and standing that it never had before. It is easier now than ever before to imagine a general saying, ‘No, we can’t do that; it would cause too many civilian deaths; we have to find another way.’ I am not sure that there are many generals who talk like that, but imagine for a moment that there are; imagine that strategies are evaluated morally as well as militarily; that civilian deaths are minimized; that new technologies are designed to avoid or limit collateral damage, and that these technologies are actually effective in achieving their intended purpose. Moral theory has been incorporated into war-making as a real constraint on when and how wars are fought. This picture is, remember, imaginary, but it is also partly true...⁴⁰

³⁹ For the purposes of this chapter, I will use the term “justification” and its cognates to refer solely to the process by which parties deem an action justified. I will refrain from making judgments about whether these actions are actually justified.

⁴⁰ Michael Walzer, *Arguing about War*, 12.

This hardly sounds like a “triumph.” Filled with qualifiers and mostly imaginary, Walzer’s evaluation of the success of just-war theory in shaping military practice is damning with faint praise. To say that justice is one consideration among many, but not the most important one, is not to pay a compliment to justice but to drain it of all meaning. The fact that his evaluation draws mostly on politicians’ use of just-war language leads one commentator, Laurie Calhoun, to say that this is not the triumph of just-war theory but merely the triumph of just-war rhetoric.⁴¹ Calhoun’s skeptical response to Walzer echoes the argument Robert Tucker makes in his 1960 book *The Just War*, “Modern just war doctrines share the fate of their predecessors in becoming scarcely distinguishable from mere ideologies the purpose of which is to provide a spurious justification for almost any use of force.”⁴²

Lest we fall into an easy cynicism about the just-war tradition, a key word in Tucker’s quotation is “becoming.” Just-war theories are meant to act as real moral restraints, but in practice they often become twisted by collective self-deception, rendered inert by moral disengagement, and overridden by extreme circumstances, ultimately losing their power to restrain violations of *jus in bello*. The rest of this section is dedicated to understanding why this is the case.

IV.A. The Rules Do Not Apply: Moral Disengagement

Psychologist Albert Bandura studies the way moral rules, even when sincerely affirmed, fail to restrain behavior. As Bandura writes, “Moral standards do not operate invariantly as internal regulators of conduct, however. Self-regulatory mechanisms do not come into play unless they are activated, and there are many social and psychological maneuvers by which

⁴¹ Laurie Calhoun, *War and Delusion*, 34.

⁴² Robert Tucker, *The Just War*, 43.

moral self-sanctions can be disengaged from humane conduct.”⁴³ To put it in the language of this chapter, even if one listens to, accepts, and wills to follow prescriptive proceduralist rules and injunctions, it is still possible that these rules and injunctions will not affect one’s actions because they are not *activated*. That is, one may not recognize one’s own actions as contravening one’s moral commitments because the moment when one tests candidate actions against moral commitments is subverted by moral disengagement. Bandura’s essay surveys these maneuvers, synthesizing work from a number of psychologists and conflict theorists in the process. In this section, I will summarize five of these maneuvers, and we will see examples of each of them in our subsequent discussions of the ethics of war and communication.

1) *Moral framing and euphemistic labeling.*

People tend to frame their own actions in morally neutral or positive ways, and to use euphemistic language that does not trigger moral red flags, making it difficult for moral rules to restrain behavior. “People do not ordinarily engage in harmful conduct,” Bandura writes, “until they have justified to themselves the morality of their actions.”⁴⁴ People innately search for justifications, and tend to justify immoral means by framing their actions solely in terms of ethical ends. Hence, a person morally averse to bombing civilians might nonetheless approve of the bombing of civilians if the action is framed as “fighting terror” or “stabilizing a region.”

This tendency causes problems, as G.E.M. Anscombe argues, because an action can be described in many different ways, each of which carries different moral significance.⁴⁵

Anscombe gives as an example the self-deception that occurs when Nazi executioners frame their actions in morally positive terms like “following orders.” Similarly, many Americans did

⁴³ Albert Bandura, “Moral Disengagement and the Perpetration of Inhumanities,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3, no. 3 (1999): 194.

⁴⁴ Bandura, “Moral Disengagement,” 194.

⁴⁵ G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957).

not fully grapple with the morality of dropping atomic bombs on Japan because the bombings were framed in terms of “ending the war.” When descriptions of this sort are used, people’s moral prohibitions against killing noncombatants are not “activated,” to use Bandura’s term.

The activation of moral rules is inhibited by the use of euphemistic language. A person who believes that torture is morally wrong, for example, might not have that commitment activated if torturous acts are labeled “enhanced interrogation.” Because the terminology is different, people are not readily confronted with the fact that they are approving and disapproving of the same behavior at the same time. Though this phenomenon does not only happen in war, war provides many examples of it. Bandura writes, “Just war tenets were devised to specify when the use of violence is morally justified. However, given people’s dexterous facility for justifying violent means, all kinds of inhumanities get clothed in moral wrappings.”⁴⁶

2) *Advantageous comparison.*

A second form of moral disengagement is advantageous comparison, the tendency to exonerate one’s own behavior by contrasting it with other people’s behavior. Just as a patch of color in a painting looks brighter or darker depending on the colors that surround it, so an action will look more or less morally justifiable depending on the actions to which it is compared. In conflict, these comparisons are usually with the prior actions of one’s own side, the imagined alternatives, or the actions of the opponent. When comparing one’s current actions with one’s prior actions, one’s self-evaluation is unlikely to be activated as long as one’s actions have precedent.⁴⁷ When a course of action is seen as standard operating procedure, people typically refrain from considering its morality.

⁴⁶ Bandura, “Moral Disengagement,” 195.

⁴⁷ For this phenomenon in war, see Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale, 1999), 66ff.

Another form of comparison is when one compares an aggressive course of action favorably to a more restrained course of action. As Bandura notes, this comparison in war often leads people to favor greater violence. Regardless of the projections of experts, people assume that applying greater force leads to more positive outcomes than applying restrained force. More frequently than this, however, people compare a candidate course of action with total inaction. Leaders in a military conflict may approve of a military action because, while it may not be morally perfect, it is better than doing nothing. These comparisons serve to make a morally objectionable action seem like the only viable option. This makes the act of choosing to pursue this action feel like it is not a real choice, and in the absence of a felt decision, it does not activate moral self-examination.

More interesting, perhaps, is when an action is compared to the actions of the enemy. If the enemy is already relying on immoral means, people are more likely to deem it fair and even necessary to follow suit. Though in theory this means conflicts would not escalate in immorality since no party wants to do something more ruthless than the opposition, in practice it has the opposite effect. Because of self-selecting bias, each side sees its enemies' actions as unjustified aggression but sees its own actions as justified responses. Thus, "by exploiting the contrast principle," Bandura writes, "reprehensible acts can be made righteous. Terrorists see their behavior as acts of selfless martyrdom by comparing them with widespread cruelties inflicted on the people with whom they identify."⁴⁸

3) *Displacement of responsibility and diffusion of responsibility.*

Summarizing the findings of Stanley Milgram's famous study, Bandura writes, "People

⁴⁸ Bandura, "Moral Disengagement," 196. Timothy McVeigh, justifying his own act of terrorism in Oklahoma City, writes, "Bombing the Murrah Federal Building was morally and strategically equivalent to the US hitting a government building in Serbia, Iraq, or other nations." In "McVeigh's letter to Rita Cosby," *Independence.net*, April 27, 2001, <http://independence.net/okc/mcveighletterfox.htm>.

will behave in ways they typically repudiate if a legitimate authority accepts responsibility for the effects of their conduct.”⁴⁹ Following an authority is another way people make choices without registering to themselves that they are making choices, thereby temporarily avoiding the felt need to reflect on the morality of their actions. Whether explicitly following a leader’s orders or more generally following the leader’s example, the moral burden is placed on another person, so an individual does not compare their own actions to their moral commitments. Tragically, an entire body politic can rely on displacement of responsibility to shield themselves from moral scrutiny. Citizens shift the responsibility to the president, the president shifts it to advisors, advisors shift it to constituents, and so on. Decisions are made and justified without anyone ever having the sense of a moral threshold being crossed.

Just as responsibility can be displaced, so also it can be diffused among members of a group. “Any harm done by a group,” Bandura finds, “can always be attributed largely to the behavior of others.”⁵⁰ This is widely known as “mob mentality,” in which people evade moral interrogation—even by themselves—by taking responsibility for only a small fraction of a collective action.⁵¹ This diffusion of responsibility is especially corrosive to the restraining power of a set of rules, since part of the reason people adhere to rules is to fit in with a social group. If “everyone else is doing it,” then regardless of explicit peer pressure it becomes more difficult for a person to justify abstaining and easier to justify participating.

Take, for example, a fight breaking out at a baseball game. A batter gets hit by a wild pitch and reacts by charging the mound. The pitcher, acting out of self-defense, punches at the

⁴⁹ Bandura, 196. Cf. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

⁵⁰ Bandura, “Moral Disengagement,” 198.

⁵¹ Cf. David Burrell and Stanley Hauerwas, “Self-Deception and Autobiography: Theological and Ethical Reflections on Speer’s *Inside the Third Reich*” in *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 200–20.

batter, and members of both teams swarm the field, shoving and hitting each other. In this melee, an outfielder shoves an opposing player to the ground. Now, the outfielder ordinarily believes that it is wrong to shove opposing players, and would typically refrain from doing so. But in this conflict the outfielder may displace responsibility by claiming that the pitcher or the batter started the fight. The outfielder may also diffuse responsibility by claiming that everyone was fighting so there is no point in singling his actions out. Even further, the outfielder could claim that because everyone was fighting, the ordinary rules of baseball etiquette were in abeyance. Given sufficiently widespread disobedience, the perceived authority of the rules erodes—think of speed limits, for example—and this happens to moral rules as well.

4) *Attribution of blame*

People morally disengage from their actions by blaming their adversaries. “In this process,” Bandura writes, “people view themselves as faultless victims driven to injurious conduct by forcible provocation.”⁵² One’s actions are treated as mere reactions, caused not by one’s own decisions but by the actions of the enemy. Attribution of blame can either be done consciously, to justify harmful actions as necessary, or subconsciously, to overlook one’s agency and bypass the need for justification.

As Bandura notes, attribution of blame is often invoked by both sides in a conflict, contributing to a phenomenon called “reciprocal escalation.” Each side understands its own actions as necessary reactions to the other side’s provocation. Hence, in modern warfare, it is not uncommon for each participant to view their involvement as a defensive struggle, merely responding to the other side’s aggression.⁵³ Because the other side started the war, it is argued,

⁵² Bandura, “Moral Disengagement,” 203.

⁵³ This is what conflict theorists call a security dilemma, in which actions taken by one side to increase their security are perceived by other parties as threats to their own security, and vice versa. See Ho-Won Jeong, *Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis* (London: SAGE Publications, 2008), 70, 160.

they are to blame for setting in motion a chain of events that includes our own punitive reactions. If our actions are excessive or barbaric, it is the other side's fault for driving us to such extremes.

This dynamic can be seen in Osama bin Laden's "Letter to America," in which he explains the motivation for the September 11 attacks. Killing civilians is typically considered a violation of *qītal*, Islam's equivalent of just-war theory, and bin Laden claims to be fighting on behalf of a "religion of showing kindness to others, establishing justice between them, granting them their rights, and defending the oppressed and the persecuted."⁵⁴ Nonetheless, al-Qaeda's attacks on America are justified, he writes, because America previously attacked Muslims in Palestine, Somalia, Chechnya, Lebanon, and Kashmir. Al-Qaeda's terrorist actions are, according to bin Laden, defensive responses to American aggression, therefore the blame for these civilians' deaths rests on America.⁵⁵

5) *Disregard and distortion of consequences and dehumanization.*

Regardless of whether the consequences of one's actions are the ultimate indicator of the ethics of those actions, consequences play an important role in our moral psychology. To disregard the consequences of our actions makes us less likely to reckon with what we have done and compare our actions to our ideals. According to Bandura, this is a common way we morally disengage. He writes, "As long as the harmful results of one's actions are ignored, minimized, distorted, or disbelieved, there is little reason for self-censure to be activated."⁵⁶

Studies have shown that the greater proximity one has to those affected by one's actions, the more difficult it is to disengage in this way. In Milgram's experiments, people were more

⁵⁴ "Osama bin Laden's 'Letter to America,'" *The Guardian*, November 24, 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver>.

⁵⁵ On the weakening of restraints of *qītal* in some Islamic groups in ways consistent with the arguments of this chapter, see Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 46–68.

⁵⁶ Bandura, "Moral Disengagement," 199.

willing to inflict pain on strangers when they did not come face-to-face with those strangers in agony. This has effects on the moral psychology of war, as Bandura notes, because we live in an age of “faceless warfare” in which military leaders and those they command do not witness firsthand the suffering their actions cause.⁵⁷

Finally, a person morally disengages from their actions by dehumanizing others, or more frequently by accepting the dehumanized status those others are assigned in one’s ideological community. By considering others as subhuman, the moral commitments one has for how to treat other humans do not activate to the same degree. This dehumanization is facilitated by racial, ethnic, and gender prejudice pre-existent in a society or manufactured through propaganda. But ideological views can also become a site for dehumanization.⁵⁸ For example, when asked in the 1960s what it feels like to take human life, Polish mercenary Rafal Gan-Ganowicz reportedly responded, “I wouldn’t know, I’ve only ever killed communists.” This is an extreme example of a common social practice: not treating others as unique individuals but merely as instances of a broader ideology or social problem.

We innately have a sense of our co-humanity with others, what Kenneth Burke calls our shared consubstantiality, which empathetically connects us to them even if we have never met them before.⁵⁹ Moral rules for social interaction codify and reinforce these empathetic connections. Because of this, Bandura writes, it is “difficult to mistreat humanized persons without suffering personal distress and self-condemnation.”⁶⁰ This is true even when a person is an ideological opponent, as long as they are recognized as fully human. When people are

⁵⁷ Bandura, “Moral Disengagement,” 199. I should add, this is also characteristic of the way people treat one another on the internet. As a medium, even Facebook is comparatively faceless, and people heap abuse on others online without recognizing the damage they are doing.

⁵⁸ I argue this point in “My Lai after Fifty Years,” *Political Theology Network*, March 16, 2018, <https://politicaltheology.com/my-lai-after-fifty-years/>.

⁵⁹ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 21.

⁶⁰ Bandura, “Moral Disengagement,” 200.

characterized as “Nazis” or “terrorists” or “anarchists,” however, it becomes harder to empathize with them and easier to justify mistreating them.

This process is called “moral exclusion.” Moral exclusion, psychologist Susan Opatow writes, “occurs when individuals or groups are perceived as *outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply.*”⁶¹ It is especially common in conflict situations. Opatow summarizes several studies on this phenomenon,

[T]hose within the community perceive their own group as more moral, honest, peaceful, virtuous, and obedient than outgroup members. The outgroup’s perceived moral failings justify utilitarian, self-maximizing decisions that dispense with concerns about their well-being. Consequently, conflict with those within the moral community takes a different form than conflict with those outside it. With those inside, conflict is the regulated competition of equals, conducted according to rules of fair play, such as a duel or a bidding war; with those outside, conflict is an unregulated, no-holds-barred power struggle among unequals, such as guerrilla warfare.⁶²

Two features of Opatow’s summary are relevant for our purposes. First, moral exclusion is a matter of how the outgroup is *perceived*, which means it is a matter more of subconscious associations than conscious decisions. These associations can be created and reinforced by the media, and often we learn about the outgroup only through readymade dehumanizing lenses. Second, moral exclusion happens among people who believe in moral, rule-governed conflict. It does not mean a rejection of moral rules, but a failure of those moral rules to activate due to the perceived inhumanity of certain enemies. One can affirm “All people have basic rights,” and at the same time violate others’ basic rights if at the moment of decision one does not recognize those others as *people*.

⁶¹ Susan Opatow, “Moral Exclusion and Injustice: An Introduction,” *Journal of Social Issues* 46, no. 1 (1990): 1. The term was coined by Ervin Staub. The term “outgroup” refers, in essence, to a “them” contrasted with an “us.”

⁶² Opatow, “Moral Exclusion and Injustice,” 6. Cf. Jeong, *Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis*, 78.

These five “maneuvers” help explain why knowing, understanding, and affirming moral rules is no guarantee that one will act accordingly. A person who is committed to these rules will nonetheless break them—in letter and in spirit—if the rules do not activate, that is, if the person is not confronted with the variance between their moral commitments and their actions. This activation, much more so than a reaffirmation of the rules or persuasive arguments about why one ought to follow them, is needed for moral commitments to restrain immoral activity. Hence, these tendencies show some of the limitations of prescriptive proceduralist ethics.

IV.B. Bending the Rules: Externality and Malleability

In this subsection, we will focus on the external and prescriptive aspects of prescriptive procedural ethics by studying how analogous aspects of *jus in bello* criteria do not adequately restrain immoral action in war. People believe in moral rules in military conflicts but these beliefs do not effectively restrain them. This happens in part because people interpret the rules and injunctions in light of their own goals and interests, and because people reject the applicability of the rules to their specific conflicts. In fact, as we shall see, promulgation of moral rules can ironically facilitate rather than restrain unjust actions.

The two most promising places to look for the triumph of just-war theory in providing restraint on conduct in war are its influence on international law and its use in training officers in military academies. These are genuine achievements for just-war theory, but we must not overestimate the restraint they actually provide.

Just-war theory’s greatest triumph in the modern age is in the realm of international law. The ratifications in overwhelming numbers of the Geneva Conventions, Geneva Protocols, and Universal Declaration of Human Rights are landmark achievements. But these do not exercise

the level of restraint on warfare that just-war theorists hope for. James Turner Johnson, for example, writes, “Not only the lacunae in extant *jus in bello* regulations but also the disregarding of some or all the provisions that do exist suggest that the consensus is superficial, fragile, and by no means universal.”⁶³ Just-war theorist Daniel Bell agrees with this, arguing that international law “is not a particularly firm foundation for the moral regulation of war.”⁶⁴ Bell points out international law is hobbled by the lack of a reliable enforcement mechanism. Its clauses can be creatively interpreted by individual nations to accommodate their perceived military necessities. Most significantly, the ideological beliefs or national interests that justify going to war in the first place are almost always seen by the nation as trumping international law. Nations are more likely to bend the rules, declare their case exceptional, or disregard the rules entirely than to forgo viable tactics simply to adhere to international law.

Just-war theory can now be found in syllabi for officers trained in military academies in the United States and several other countries. This is a promising development, but it is not clear that this kind of education translates into more restrained practice in the face of military expediency. Historian Alexander Downes argues that military culture, including training and prewar policies, is not a sufficient restraint on *jus in bello* violations. He writes, “Escalation to civilian victimization, however, eventually occurs whether or not it is compatible with military culture because it is a logical response to the rising costs of battle and/or the need to achieve victory or stave off defeat.”⁶⁵ That is, when there is a tension, officers’ strategic training in how to *win* wars often overrides their moral training in how to *wage* wars. This sort of moral training

⁶³ *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War*, 82. Cf. 218–19.

⁶⁴ Daniel M. Bell Jr., *Just War as Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 62. Walzer is more optimistic, though only slightly. He writes, “The ‘government’ of these rules, since it is not backed up by police power or authoritative courts, is to a large degree ineffective—but not entirely so.” *Arguing about War*, 91.

⁶⁵ Alexander B. Downes, *Targeting Civilians in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2008), 29.

may prevent gratuitous violence in wartime—which is a significant achievement—but does little to prevent indiscriminate or cruel violence deemed tactically advantageous.

Given the changing circumstances and technology of war, it is common for military leaders trained in just-war ethics to insist that a new situation invalidates previously-held beliefs about moral conduct in war. Officers, it has often been observed, are trained how to win the *previous* war, and thus have to improvise and adapt their training in order to prevail in unprecedented conflicts. Hence, the “that was then, this is now” argument blunts the restraining power of just-war training. As Daniel Bell writes, “A rule-based ethic is insufficient because war is not a static thing but always changing, while the rules of war are invariably written for the last war. A rule-based ethic is always playing catch-up.”⁶⁶ In addition to rules themselves being seen as outdated, those who propound these rules may be seen as out of touch with the demands of the present conflict. Military leaders do not always consider just-war theorists to be authoritative sources, even when those just-war theorists are veterans or teach ethics at military academies. Just-war professors can be dismissed as moralists who do not know what it is like to fight in a war, or at least do not know what it is like to fight in *this* war. To revisit a point made earlier in this chapter, the *external* nature of just-war criteria makes them easy to disregard by those actively engaged in conflict. Even further, an attempt to challenge the morality of a military course of action may be treated as a threat to the united front or as giving “aid and comfort” to the enemy, so otherwise fair interpretations of the rules may be rejected out of hand.

Because scholars, veterans of past wars, and international legal bodies are not fully recognized as moral authorities by military leaders, it is only the interpretations of participants in

⁶⁶ Bell, *Just War as Christian Discipleship*, 80.

the conflict that matter when these rules are taken into consideration in a conflict. This means that rules are often stretched to fit the perceived military needs of the group.⁶⁷ As we have already mentioned, flexibility in the way the word “torture” is defined means that certain countries, including the United States, can insist that they do not rely on torture while still approving of “enhanced interrogation” tactics that are generally considered torture. Groups also alternately emphasize the spirit of the rules or the explicit wording of the rules, depending on which is more permissive. For example, German leaders punctiliously defended their use of chemical weapons in World War I by saying that the Hague Convention of 1899, which Germany had signed, only forbade the use of *projectiles* dispensing chemical weapons, and said nothing about opening canisters of lethal chlorine gas and letting the wind carry it to the enemy.

The fact that parties to a conflict interpret the rules selectively and for their own purposes means that just-war theory can ironically facilitate unjust violence. Political scientist Michael Butler concludes that the just-war tradition has “swung pendulum-like from a restraining position to a facilitative one,”⁶⁸ and in present-day America just-war language is invoked more to justify and excuse violence than to restrain it to its moral limits. Walzer writes that in fact this is nothing new; appeals to just-war constraints over the centuries have been hypocritical more often than not.⁶⁹ Though serious just-war theorists intend to keep warfare proportional, discriminating, honest, and humane, the popular idea of a “just war” has had the opposite effects. Laurie Calhoun makes this point strongly, writing that “far from limiting warfare, the just-war paradigm facilitates it.”⁷⁰ On her argument, just-war theory provides a readymade language by which

⁶⁷ This is an example of motivated reasoning. See Ziva Kunda, “The Case for Motivated Reasoning,” *Psychological Bulletin* 108, no. 3 (1990): 480–98.

⁶⁸ Butler, *Selling a ‘Just’ War*, 44.

⁶⁹ Walzer, *Arguing about War*, 4. Cf. *Just and Unjust Wars*, 20. Walzer, like Butler, believes that the just-war tradition has been used for both facilitative and restrictive purposes.

⁷⁰ Calhoun, *War and Delusion*, 2. Cf. 43–45.

politicians and military leaders can assure citizens that their cause is just and the civilian death toll is morally permissible. Calhoun argues that even scholarly formulations of the just-war theory are beset with “radical indeterminacy and quasi-infinite malleability,” and this is even more the case with the public imagination of just-war criteria.⁷¹ Butler and Calhoun conclude that regardless of the best intentions of ethicists, in its actual employment just-war theory is a tool for rationalization. It becomes a way for nations to self-delusively maintain that their violence is morally justified even if it is indistinguishable in its enormity from their opponents’ tactics.

Take, for example, this justification for the use of poisonous gases in World War I by British Lieutenant-General Charles Ferguson,

It is a cowardly form of warfare which does not commend itself to me or to other English soldiers, but it is clearly impossible to get the enemy to desist from this and other contraventions of previously recognized rules of warfare by holding up our hands with abhorrence at such unseemly conduct on his part.

We cannot win the war unless we kill or incapacitate more of our enemies than they of us, and if this can only be done by copying the enemy in his choice of weapons, we must not refuse to do so.⁷²

According to Ferguson, English soldiers find using poisonous gas morally abhorrent but will nevertheless use it as a last resort because their hand has been forced by the barbaric enemy.

Tellingly, this same justification was used by Germans in the same war, who argued that the French were the first to use chemical weapons and that the German Army had no alternative.⁷³

Both sides were able to preserve their consciences while nevertheless using mustard gas in violation of international law, and both sides accomplish this by shifting the blame to their

⁷¹ Calhoun, *War and Delusion*, 33.

⁷² Quoted in Tim Cook, *No Place to Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 37.

⁷³ L.F. Haber, *The Poisonous Cloud: Chemical Warfare in the First World War* (New York: Oxford, 1986).

enemy and by making appeals to military necessity. Through these appeals, leaders are able to insist that they prefer not to engage in this sort of warfare and that they find it morally troubling, while nevertheless excusing themselves and continuing to employ immoral means. They thus acknowledge the moral precepts of just-war theory while justifying actions that are at odds with the idea of a just war.

IV.C. The Rules Were Made to Be Broken: Overriding Justice

Resort to unjust means by military leaders is not due to mere *akrasia* or weakness of will, but occurs as part of a predictable process, in which each step in a moral escalation seems justifiable at the time (if it seems like a step at all). In this subsection, we will analyze the factors that make departure from *jus in bello* criteria seem rational, imperceptible, humanitarian, and necessary.

Although just-war theory involves separate constraints on the ends for which war may be fought (*jus ad bellum*) and the means that may be used (*jus in bello*), in practice the procedural norms drop out and the ends are often taken to justify the means.⁷⁴ Yoder writes of American foreign policy, echoing Tucker's argument, "We try to stay out of a war until it is very clear to us that we know whom to blame. Then we want to plunge in and fight without restraint, to win at all costs. To say it technically, considerations of *jus ad bellum* are given such weight that, once satisfied, they threaten to override the restraints of *jus in bello*. If the cause that is at stake is great enough, some of the ordinary restraints may be disregarded in order to win soon and

⁷⁴ The following discussion of just-war theory synthesizes points made by Yoder, Calhoun, Tucker, Walzer, and James Turner Johnson, as well as Andrew Fiala's *The Just War Myth*, Michael Butler's *Selling a 'Just' War*, Jonathan Glover's *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, and Alexander Downes's *Targeting Civilians in War*. Readers seeking further historical examples should consult these texts.

decisively.”⁷⁵ This notion, that only the criterion of just cause really matters, is not unique to American foreign policy but, as Walzer notes, “it is universal in the history of war.” Walzer continues, “The rules are broken for the sake of the cause. It is with some version of the argument for justice that the violations are defended.”⁷⁶

This tendency is universal in the history of war, but as political scientist Alexander Downes argues, it is especially characteristic of the way democracies fight wars. In order for the leaders of a democratic state to justify going to war, there has to be sufficient support among the population for the cause. But as war progresses, leaders accountable to this population feel increasing pressure to bring the troops home and defeat the enemy, who typically gets demonized in the process of building support for the cause. Downes writes, “Terrific combat losses, moreover, sap morale on the home front, causing civilians to lose faith in victory and pressure the government to stop the war... Targeting enemy civilians (or using force less discriminating)—because it can provide a way to continue attacking the enemy yet decrease one’s own losses at the same time—is a rational solution.”⁷⁷ On Downes’s analysis, as plans for swift victory become frustrated and war is prolonged, leaders typically make appeals to military necessity and the lesser of two evils, ultimately justifying indiscriminate violence in an attempt to win the war and minimize further casualties to their side. Downes’s argument is consistent with President Harry Truman’s justification for dropping atomic bombs on civilians, “They never would have surrendered otherwise. I don’t believe in speculating on the mental feeling and

⁷⁵ Yoder, *When War Is Unjust*, 64.

⁷⁶ Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 227.

⁷⁷ Downes, *Targeting Civilians in War*, 32.

as far as the bomb is concerned I ordered its use for a military reason—for no other cause—and it saved the lives of a great many of our soldiers. That is all I had in mind.”⁷⁸

The perceived stakes of losing the war, not only for the troops but for the world, are also factors in the neutralizing or overriding of just-war restraints. Jonathan Glover puts it well, “It seems paradoxical to justify fighting a bloody war by saying Hitler must be defeated, and then to accept restrictions which may mean the war is followed by Hitler’s victory.”⁷⁹ This parallels our earlier discussion of abiding by moral rules as fighting with one hand tied behind your back. When the chips are down, there are values more important than proportionality, honesty, discrimination, and humaneness. As Walzer puts it, “When our deepest values are radically at risk, the constraints lose their grip and a certain kind of utilitarianism reimposes itself.”⁸⁰ This loosening of constraints often happens gradually. Glover details the shift in British policy during World War II from a principled rejection of discrimination through a set of incremental changes to a policy of terror bombing civilians. Glover calls this escalation “moral slide.” This escalation involves an increasing turn to utilitarian justifications in addition to the attribution of blame and advantageous comparison that Bandura discussed.

American four-star General Curtis LeMay illustrates the humanitarian rationale for escalating warfare beyond the bounds of just-war criteria. When debating Cold War-era conflicts in the Pacific, LeMay noted that in the 1950s land war in Korea, the fighting was prolonged and there was a great deal of Korean suffering. A massive initial strike would show more compassion

⁷⁸ Harry Truman, quoted in Fiala, *The Just War Myth*, 185. Fiala comments, “This utilitarian calculation reminds us of the problem confronted by democratic politicians who lead a nation into war. Noble principles such as those of *jus in bello* are not strong enough to withstand the political pressure to save the lives of one’s own soldiers.” Fiala, 185–86.

⁷⁹ Jonathan Glover, *Humanity*, 85.

⁸⁰ Walzer, *Arguing About War*, 40.

for the nation that was attacked than a lengthy and destructive infantry battle in line with just-war criteria. LeMay concluded,

What I'm trying to say is if once you make a decision to use military force to solve your problem, then you ought to use it and use an overwhelming military force. Use too much and deliberately use too much so that you don't make an error on the other side and not quite have enough. And you roll over everything to start with and you close it down just like that. And you save resources, you save lives—not only your own but the enemy's too, and the recovery is quicker and everybody's back to peaceful existence hopefully in a shorter period of time.⁸¹

Historian Dan Carlin summarizes this logic, “Total war saves lives; limited war prolongs the nastiness.”⁸² The deliberate use of excessive force through a bombing invasion, when advantageously compared with a more restrained engagement, is a more humanitarian option in keeping with the presumed goals of just-war theory even if breaking its explicit restrictions.

The crucial lesson from this discussion of just-war theory is that the rules are broken not simply because people do not know the rules or because people are especially barbarous, but because violations come to be seen as rational, humanitarian, and necessary. This is especially the case when winning the war quickly is more desirable than fighting it morally, that is, when following the rules strictly could lead to many more deaths on one's side.

This logic is the heart of General William T. Sherman's famous “war is hell” argument.⁸³ Sherman was not arguing that since war is hell we should expect the demonic to come out in men. Nor was he arguing that war is so infernal that no constraints can effectively be put upon it.

⁸¹ Quoted in Warren Kozak, *Curtis LeMay: Strategist and Tactician* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2009), 307.

⁸² Dan Carlin, Hardcore History podcast, Episode 59, “The Destroyer of Worlds” <http://www.dancarlin.com/hardcore-history-59-the-destroyer-of-worlds/>.

⁸³ See, for example, Sherman's “Letter to James M. Calhoun, et al., September 12, 1964.” Sherman's logic has been echoed in wars ever since. For example, to justify bombing Hamburg in World War II, an action that killed forty-five thousand civilians, the Royal Air Force said, “The total destruction of this city... would play a very important part in shortening and winning the war.” Quoted in Michael Bess, *Choices Under Fire*, 95.

Rather, his argument was that war is so destructive that anything that can be done to end it swiftly ought to be done. The deep irony of war is that both sides in a conflict can adopt the same rationale. War is escalated precisely by our efforts to end it. It is a beast that thrives on attempts to kill it.

This tendency toward moral slide and escalation to injustice is in the background of Michael Walzer's influential discussion of "supreme emergencies." According to Walzer, there are *jus in bello* rules that govern the ethical conduct of warfare. These rules, however, can be "overridden" in situations of severe threat. He writes, "Utilitarian calculation can force us to violate the rules of war only when we are face-to-face not merely with defeat but with a defeat likely to bring disaster to a political community."⁸⁴ Walzer rejects utilitarianism and insists on a just-war theory that recognizes human rights, but only up to a certain point. In especially dire circumstances, we cross an ethical threshold and transition from a rights-regarding ethic into a "utilitarianism of extremity" in which practices ruled out by *jus in bello* norms—such as targeting civilians—become excusable.⁸⁵

In articulating a just-war ethic with a supreme emergency clause, Walzer is not advocating the resort to unlimited warfare but rather hoping to constrain this tendency exclusively to extreme situations. Supreme emergency clauses—Walzer's and others'—are attempts for rule-based, procedural ethics to provide rules for when all of the other rules can be broken. Walzer's analysis presupposes that military leaders will be tempted to sacrifice their moral commitments for the sake of victory, and seeks to restrain this moral slide by setting the

⁸⁴ Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 255, 265.

⁸⁵ Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 231. Michael Moore describes this position as "threshold deontology," *Placing Blame: A General Theory of the Criminal Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

conditions under which just-war rules may be broken. These conditions are threefold: “*only* in the face of a far greater immorality, as in the example of a Nazi-like attack on the very existence of a particular community, and *only* at the moment when this attack is near success, and *only* insofar as the immoral response is the only way of holding off that success.”⁸⁶

Walzer’s doctrine of supreme emergency is thus another attempt to restrain unjust warfare. But his notion of supreme emergency, like the idea of a just war more broadly, might ironically facilitate rather than restrain unjust tactics.⁸⁷ The idea of a “supreme emergency,” though less widely known than the idea of a “just war,” can similarly be used in a facilitative way. Walzer intends the doctrine of supreme emergency to act as a check on the recurring tendency for military leaders to jettison human rights in their pursuit of victory. But even if leaders abide by Walzer’s own descriptions of a supreme emergency, it is far too easy on these terms to contend that a situation is dire enough to justify a “by any means necessary” abrogation of human rights. Consider the following passage from Walzer on supreme emergencies:

[W]e do try to carry on, and also to improve upon, a way of life handed down by our ancestors, and we hope for recognizable descendants, carrying on and improving our way of life. This commitment to continuity across generations is a very powerful feature of human life, and it is embodied in the community. When our community is threatened, not just in its present territorial extension or governmental structure or prestige or honor, but in what we think of as its *ongoingness*, then we face a loss that is greater than any we can imagine, except for the destruction of humanity itself. We face moral as well as physical extinction, the end of a way of life as well as of a set of particular lives, the

⁸⁶ Walzer, *Arguing about War*, 50. Emphasis mine.

⁸⁷ Regarding the supreme emergency idea, C.A.J. Coady writes, “In the context of public discourse about war and terrorism, we should be particularly worried about allowing exemptions from profound moral and legal constraints under categories that are, at the very least, so open to divergent interpretations. Both the morality and the legality of political violence must be concerned with the dangerous consequences of allowing justifications or exemptions that are likely to be exploited by any side in the conflict.” In “Terrorism, Morality, and Supreme Emergency,” *Ethics* 114 (July 2004): 787.

disappearance of people like us. And it is then that we may be driven to break through the moral limits that people like us normally attend to and respect.⁸⁸

It is clear from his writings that Walzer intends military appeal to supreme emergency to be a rare event, invoked only against threats like the Nazis. But it is also clear from passages like this that the idea of a supreme emergency suffers from the rhetorical “quasi-infinite malleability” Calhoun describes, and can be employed to justify breaking *jus in bello* rules in a wide range of conflicts. After all, in the heat of conflict many things could be plausibly described as threats to the ongoingness of a community’s way of life. Even if leaders feel compelled to abide by ethicists’ qualifications on “supreme emergency”—which, as with just war rhetoric in general, they are not obliged to do—they can employ this exception so liberally that they make the rules functionally irrelevant. Rules that are binding on us *except at the moments we are most tempted to break them* are, in effect, no rules at all.⁸⁹

What is perhaps most troubling about the abuse of just-war theory is the amount of self-deception made possible by just-war rules.⁹⁰ As we have discussed, military leaders will maintain that they are committed to just-war rules while simultaneously morally disengaging from the rules, interpreting the rules selectively so as to justify their side’s actions while condemning enemies’ similar actions, considering their actions justifiable exceptions to the rules, progressively abandoning those rules by appealing to military necessity as the war goes on, or being willing to override these rules altogether by appeal to supreme emergency. By believing they are (or at least claiming to be) fighting a just war while breaking *jus in bello* rules, these people have their cake and eat it too. They prevent themselves—and what is arguably worse,

⁸⁸ Walzer, *Arguing about War*, 43.

⁸⁹ Cf. John Howard Yoder, *When War Is Unjust*, 58.

⁹⁰ On self-deception, see Herbert Fingarette, *Self-Deception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

prevent soldiers—from coming face-to-face with the moral realities of the military actions they approve. It is for this reason that Yoder writes, “In some respects the hypocritical claim to be exercising real restraint, when in fact there is none, may do more harm than outright honest ‘realism’.”⁹¹ The abuse of just-war categories makes individuals act according to one ethical logic while telling themselves and others that they are acting according to another. This, as we shall discuss later in this chapter, is also true in social conflict.

IV.D. Values, Survival, and the Rules

This self-deception is evident in the American leadership at the height of the Cold War. Three important documents show how one can both *believe that there are moral and democratic rules governing behavior in conflicts* and also *believe that these rules should not govern our behavior in a particular conflict*. These documents dramatize the weakness of moral rules to restrain immoral action in conflict situations.

In a 1955 letter to a former American ambassador, President Eisenhower writes, “I have come to the conclusion that some of our traditional ideas of international sportsmanship are scarcely applicable in the morass in which the world now flounders.” Eisenhower writes that American commitments to “truth, honor, justice, consideration for others, [and] liberty for all” must be preserved through the conflict, though he adds with emphasis, “*we must not confuse these values with mere procedures, even though these last may have at one time held almost the status of moral concepts.*” Eisenhower insists, that is, that in the context of the struggle against the Soviet Union, the ends (values) must take priority over the means (procedures). He acknowledges the immorality of the U.S. intervening in civil wars and using other nations to

⁹¹ Yoder, *When War Is Unjust*, 66. Calhoun and Fiala both make similar points.

shore up a Pacific barrier against communism. But he contends that this immorality must be risked because the Soviet enemy is so contemptuous of morality. “Some of the deportment that was once an essential part of international relationships,” he concludes, “cannot be faithfully and stubbornly maintained by ourselves when the other side insists on practicing the habits of a thug.”⁹² Because the Soviet threat is so grave and because the Soviet Union refuses to abide by moral guidelines, Eisenhower argues, American leaders must suspend the moral code they cherish, and think instead of preserving their values at all costs.

Likewise, the 1954 Doolittle Report, an important Cold War text and founding document for the CIA, includes the following passage:

It is now clear that we are facing an enemy whose avowed objective is world domination by whatever means at whatever cost. Hitherto acceptable norms of human conduct do not apply. If the United States is to survive, long-standing American concepts of ‘fair play’ must be reconsidered. We must develop effective espionage and counterespionage services and must learn to subvert, sabotage, and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated, and more effective methods than those used against us. It may become necessary that the American people become acquainted with, understand, and support this fundamentally repugnant philosophy.⁹³

We see in this text the same affirmations found in Eisenhower’s letter: first, that there are norms that govern human conduct, and second, that these norms do not apply in the Cold War. These norms do not apply for two related reasons: because the enemy is resorting to immoral means, and because the enemy constitutes a threat to America’s continued existence.

⁹² “Letter from President Eisenhower to Lewis W. Douglas,” March 29, 1955.

⁹³ “The Doolittle Report,” Central Intelligence Agency, 1954, www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/doolittle_report.pdf, p. 2. Cf. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 164–65.

The same affirmations are found in the influential State Department text NSC-68, written chiefly by Paul Nitze in 1950, which set the agenda for American policy toward the Soviet Union. NSC-68 first affirms that “The free society is limited in its choice of means to achieve its ends,”⁹⁴ and affirms some of the constraints of just-war theory. Two pages later, however, after insistences that the survival of the free world is at stake and after describing how the Soviets are not morally limited and will use whatever means expedient, NSC-68 says, “The integrity of our system will not be jeopardized by any measures, covert or overt, violent or non-violent, which serve the purposes of frustrating the Kremlin design...”⁹⁵ These statements are difficult to reconcile with one another, and the justification seems to be that the communist threat is *so severe* that Americans could act in un-American ways for the purpose of stopping communism’s spread.⁹⁶

Eisenhower, Doolittle, and the authors of NSC-68 believe that America’s hand has been forced by the enemy; in the words of NSC-68, “unwillingly our free society finds itself mortally challenged by the Soviet system.”⁹⁷ Only because the USSR is so evil are Americans compelled to adopt what they believe to be a “fundamentally repugnant philosophy,” the notion that the ends justify the means. In all three documents, the blame is shifted to the Soviet Union for making Americans deviate from their own moral commitments and forcing Americans to resort

⁹⁴ “NSC-68,” 10.

⁹⁵ “NSC-68,” 12.

⁹⁶ Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis writes, “The reconciliation the authors probably had in mind was this: that while in principle a democracy should choose its means selectively, when confronted by an absolute threat to its survival, anything was fair game... The world crisis, as dangerous in its potential as anything confronted in World Wars I or II, rendered all interests vital, all means affordable, all methods justifiable.” In “NSC-68 and the Soviet Threat,” *International Security* 4, no. 4 (1980): 167.

⁹⁷ “NSC-68,” 9.

to a strategy “more effective, more unique, and, if necessary, more ruthless than that employed by the enemy.”⁹⁸

It is important to realize that Eisenhower, Doolittle, and the authors of NSC-68 are not hard-and-fast ends-justify-the-means realists; all agree that there are moral norms that apply in wartime. Insisting to them that there are rules of *jus in bello* that ought to be followed would only be telling them something they already believe. All agree that there are procedural norms that are binding on free nations, indeed all agree that adherence to these norms sets free nations apart from their totalitarian enemies, and yet all are willing to justify breaking these norms. American leaders in the Cold War self-deceptively believed that they were standing up for moral norms while at the same time knowingly justifying deviation from those norms. Indeed, they used their nation’s commitment to the rules of justice and fairness to argue that their nation was worthy of breaking the rules. This, I am arguing, illustrates what is flawed about prescriptive proceduralism.

Summarizing much of what we have discussed so far, the rules of *jus in bello* are sometimes broken because people are unaware of them or maliciously disregard them, but more often they are broken precisely by people who know them and believe in them, and these departures—when recognized as such—are often justified by an appeal to ethics. Individuals who believe in moral norms governing the waging of war tend to justify these deviations for three reasons:

- 1) *For the sake of values.* In war, one deviates from the right for the sake of the good. The values that one prizes are seen as trumping the moral rules one usually follows.

⁹⁸ “Doolittle Report,” 2.

Eisenhower's commitments to "truth, honor, justice, consideration for others," and the rest, for example, are deemed so precious that the goal of defending them justifies temporarily swerving from the norms that govern international relations. According to this logic, one is not abandoning one's moral commitments so much as fighting for the ethical values that ground these very commitments.

- 2) *For the sake of survival.* When there is an existential threat to a community's way of life, individuals will justify exceptions to their moral commitments for the sake of survival. On this logic, the enemy threat has created a situation in which individuals are virtually coerced into unjust warfare; individuals break their own rules without thereby abandoning them because they are acting *in extremis* and have no other choice. This, it should be noted, is not limited to the survival of one's own community; often exceptions are justified for the survival of third parties, or even the opponents.
- 3) *For the sake of the rules themselves.* Frequently in war, leaders will justify extreme measures as a reprisal for unjust actions by the enemy. The logic goes: our side needs to retaliate with equal or superior force in order to teach the enemy a lesson, or to make an example of the enemy. After the enemy and third parties have learned not to use those tactics for fear of further punishment, war will be conducted in a more just fashion. Perhaps counter-intuitively, it is those who are committed to the existence of moral rules for just war who are liable to justify unjust attacks to punish those who break these rules.⁹⁹ Individuals break their rules without self-consciously abandoning them because they act unjustly for the sake of restoring a just order.

⁹⁹ See William Ascher's research on "aggrieved moralism" in "The Moralism of Attitudes Supporting Intergroup Violence," *Political Psychology* 7, no. 3 (1986): 411-12.

There is, as we have seen, a bitter irony to all three of these justifications. Both sides in a conflict can appeal to them to justify escalation beyond moral boundaries, and the actions of one side can be construed as justifying more ruthless responses by the other. Belief in the existence of moral rules of war does little to prevent, and in some cases may even facilitate, this spiraling escalation. Two warring nations—both of whom take themselves to be committed to just-war criteria—can nonetheless resort to increasingly unjust tactics while morally disengaging or justifying their actions at every step.

V. The Parallels with Social Conflict

In this chapter, I am arguing that social conflict functions in much the same way as military conflict, and thus attempts to restrain social conflict by rules of moral communication suffer the same limitations as attempts to restrain military conflict by *jus in bello* criteria. Now that we have surveyed the limitations of just-war theory, we can make explicit how this is analogous to the social sphere.

Attempts to restrain immoral social conflict by promoting “rules of engagement” for civil communication suffer from the same four main problems that beset the *jus in bello* criteria of just-war theory. These correlate to the four elements of prescriptive proceduralism and the four weaknesses of prescriptive proceduralism I surveyed in Section II. They are:

- 1) The *cognitive* aspect. Individuals can understand and believe in the existence of moral rules governing action, while nonetheless failing to apply these rules to their actions because of the way these actions get framed through dehumanizing lenses, diffusion of responsibility, and so on.

- 2) The *external* aspect. Attempts to apply the rules lack credibility due to the external status of the rules to the present conflict. The theorist prescribing the rules can be dismissed as lacking authority due to his or her distance from the conflict or discredited as giving aid and comfort to the enemy. Alternatively, the rules themselves can be considered binding for other conflicts but inapplicable to this conflict due to its unique nature.
- 3) The *prescriptive* aspect. There is always ambiguity in the rules, which is exacerbated by the fact that each side interprets the rules in light of their own interests. Even when parties agree on the rules, warfare and social conflict do not have authoritative referees entrusted by participants with adjudicating when rules have been broken.
- 4) The *procedural* aspect. There is a tendency for the ends to override the means when the stakes are high, and people justify violating the rules in order to achieve victory for ethical reasons. Even if this tendency is foreseen and conditions are set regarding when the rules may justifiably be broken, the criteria for these exceptional cases (e.g., Walzer's three "onlys") also suffer from problems #1-4.

The fourth of these is the most important for our purposes. In both military conflict and social conflict, it is not ignorance of the rules, lack of training in the rules, or contempt for the rules that is chiefly responsible for people breaking the rules. Military leaders justify unjust actions and individuals justify uncivil speech because they believe doing so is necessary to achieve their goals. What Walzer says about war could be said about many situations of political, ethical, and religious conflict: "The rules are broken for the sake of the cause. It is with some version of the argument for justice that the violations are defended."

In conflict situations, ethical reasons are given to justify breaking the rules. As we have seen, military leaders justify breaking the rules of *jus in bello* for such noble purposes as saving the lives of their soldiers, ending the war, protecting a threatened community, preventing prolonged combat, preserving timeless values, and punishing an aggressor to deter further injustice. It is for these ethical ends that people turn to immoral means. The same could be said of those who resort to immoral communication practices like demonization, deception, stereotyping, and silencing others. Individuals justify resorting to these actions by appealing to values, survival, and restoring justice. Recall Alinsky once again, who said he finds smear campaigns repugnant but would willingly engage in one for the sake of the “40,000 poor.” Alinsky’s claim is tantamount to an appeal to military necessity in the realm of social conflict.

Indeed, some Civility advocates and communication ethicists have the equivalent of a supreme emergency clause in their ethical criteria. After developing an ethic centered on self-determination and democratic deliberation, communication ethicist Thomas Nilsen writes that there are “exceptional times” when social change requires the abandonment of persuasion and the acceptance instead of “the destructive.” Using the language of last resort, Nilsen writes that these “unusual circumstances” call for “unusual speech” that deviates from the ethical criteria that governs our communication in other conflicts.¹⁰⁰ Franklyn Haiman makes a similar move. After arguing against the use of manipulative and deceptive persuasive techniques, Haiman concedes that “in particular situations, the end justifies the means” and that necessity may oblige us to resort to means that are “inherently unethical.”¹⁰¹ Not all communication ethicists have

¹⁰⁰ Nilsen, *Ethics of Speech Communication*, 68, 78.

¹⁰¹ Haiman, “A Re-Examination of the Ethics of Persuasion,” 7, 9. Haiman takes a dirty hands approach similar to Walzer’s, writing for example, “There may be times when the only way to protect ourselves from the onslaught of others is to engage in the enemy’s tactics,” and “If we are going to train people to be skillful in [manipulative] persuasion let us do it in the same kind of context that we build atomic bombs—with the clear realization that the

such explicit thresholds, but many communication ethicists allow exceptions to their moral rules in situations when it is deemed necessary for positive social change.¹⁰²

As we have discussed, in military conflict, moral disengagement and ethical justification contribute to self-deception and prevent people from recognizing that they are effectively abandoning their own moral commitments. We see this same phenomenon in social conflict as well; groups will shift the blame to their opponents and insist that they had no other choice, insist that they are preserving their core values, and justify incivilities for the sake of restoring civility.¹⁰³

Appeals to supreme emergency can be another form of self-deception. We judge others by their actions but we judge ourselves by our ideals. If we deem some of our actions exceptions to our rules, and then identify with these rules while distancing ourselves from the exceptions, we sustain a delusion. This delusion is dangerous not only because it clashes so starkly with how others perceive us, but because it prevents us from coming to terms with our own actions. This phenomenon, I believe, accounts for why people can fail to recognize the disparity between their commitment to civility and their uncivil behavior. They believe that they are vanguards of civility because they identify with their civil behavior and disidentify from their exceptions.¹⁰⁴

VI. The Culture War

activity cannot be justified by democratic ethics.” Cf. Ronald Arnett and Pat Arneson, *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 286.

¹⁰² Johanneson, *Ethics in Human Communication*, 28, 71. Cf. W. Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn, *Moral Conflict* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997), 166–67.

¹⁰³ On this last point, consider the way the Trump administration and liberal media outlets treat one another, each becoming more caustic and arguably more slanderous in a stated effort to check the other’s deception and disrespect.

¹⁰⁴ Leroy Pelton writes, “Once we allow ends to justify means in our thinking there is seemingly no limit to what our own self-righteousness will permit us to endorse... In a conflict, when we look at our adversary we tend to focus on his means and condemn him for his inhumanity, but when we look at ourselves we focus on our ends and revel in our righteousness.” *The Psychology of Nonviolence* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1974), 44.

At this point, it might be objected that the analogy has been pushed too far. The stakes in warfare are much higher than the stakes in social conflict, one could argue, so the reasons why military leaders resort to bombing civilians have no analogy with the reasons why ordinary people resort to *ad hominem* attacks in online comments sections. Although partisans in political, ethical, and religious struggles draw continually on the language of war, it would certainly be a mistake to take these well-worn metaphors as proof of a deeper isomorphism between social conflict and military conflict. Nevertheless, participants in these struggles perceive themselves to be in battles for values, survival, and a just order.¹⁰⁵ In this final section, we will briefly examine one of these conflicts—the American “culture war”—to see the logic of war in action. For many, just as the urgency of modern war is taken to justify going beyond *jus in bello* limits, the urgency of the culture war justifies going beyond the bounds of respectful discourse.¹⁰⁶ To understand why, I will draw on the work of sociologist James Davison Hunter.

Hunter’s famous culture war hypothesis, originally presented in the 1991 book *Culture Wars*, explains how a wide range of ethical, political, and religious debates in the United States get framed as one massive clash between two competing worldviews, the traditionalist right and the progressive left.¹⁰⁷ In his follow-up book, *Before the Shooting Begins*, and subsequent writings, Hunter surveys in greater depth the polarized cultural-political climate in America,

¹⁰⁵ Comparing present-day political and cultural struggle to the American Civil War, Randall Kennedy writes, “Some might dismiss this comparison on the grounds that we simply do not face social cleavages with anything near the depth and ferocity as the conflict over slavery. But this misperceives in the intensity of feelings underlying the various battles being waged over the country’s future.” In “State of the Debate.”

¹⁰⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, for one, does not believe that war has an utterly unique logic, writing, “War is a clash between major interests, which is resolved by bloodshed—that is the only way in which it differs from other conflicts... Politics, moreover, is the womb in which war develops—where its outlines already exist in their hidden rudimentary form like the characteristics of living creatures in their embryos.” *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 173.

¹⁰⁷ Hunter, *Culture Wars*. For a reworking of Hunter’s thesis and a defense of its applicability in the present day, see my “The Struggle is Real: Understanding the American ‘Culture War’” in *Religion and Culture Forum*, July 2017.

concluding, “The discord taking place in public life, then, goes beyond mere political disagreement following the collapse of a consensus over these matters. It is very much a war to impose a new consensus by virtually any political and rhetorical means possible.”¹⁰⁸ Three features of this “war to impose a new consensus” suggest that the same dynamics that inhibit *jus in bello* rules from restraining unjust war also inhibit prescriptive proceduralist ethics from restraining incivility.

VI.A. Beyond the Pale

As we have seen, Civility advocates and communication ethicists seek to restrain immoral communication by appealing to the needs of democratic society. In the disagreements that constitute the American culture war, however, this approach gets complicated in two ways, both reflecting our earlier discussion of moral exclusion.

First, each side in the culture war champions values that it takes to be more important than the health and sustainability of democratic society. Hunter notes that in American political culture, “claims are posited as fundamental rights that *transcend* democratic processes. The right to have an abortion and the right to life, for example, are both put forward as rights which transcend deliberation.”¹⁰⁹ That is, even if one agrees with Civility advocates that incivility imperils the climate of cooperation and functioning of democracy, people are committed to values more fundamental than their commitment to a healthy democratic society. Hunter labels these claims “antidemocratic,” but a better term would be suprademocratic. The controversies that have divided America over the last fifty years have largely been over *rights*, which have an

¹⁰⁸ James Davison Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 10.

¹⁰⁹ Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins*, 5.

ethical claim on us greater than the democratic need to make sure arguments are expressed respectfully and dissenting views are given a fair hearing. In these conflicts over fundamental rights, ethicists who appeal to the discursive climate of the democracy are seen as at best concerned with matters of less-than-fundamental importance, and at worst opponents of the rights in question.¹¹⁰

Second, partisans in social conflict may not see their position as one voice among others in democratic deliberation, but rather identify their standpoint as a prerequisite for democratic society itself. To see this in action, let us return to Civility advocate Sidney Hook. After championing a method for resolving conflicts democratically, Hook writes,

Those who believe in democracy must distinguish intelligently and act resolutely. First of all, they must distinguish between honest opposition *within* the framework of the democratic process and the opposition, subsidized and controlled by the totalitarian enemies of democracy, which is a form of treason to everything democrats hold dear. Opposition of the first kind, no matter how mistaken, must be tolerated, if for no other reason than that we cannot be sure that it is not we who are mistaken. Opposition of the second kind, no matter what protective coloration it wears—and it will usually be found wrapped up in counterfeit symbols of patriotism or in recently acquired vestments of the Bill of Rights—must be swiftly dealt with if democracy is to survive.¹¹¹

This, as I take it, is a *de facto* supreme emergency clause for Hook's ethics of communication. Dissenting voices within the democratic framework must be listened to, answered, and treated respectfully. Enemies of democracy, however, must be "swiftly dealt with," a somewhat ominous phrase on which Hook does not elaborate.

¹¹⁰ Hunter writes that attempts to adjudicate and, I would add, regulate the culture war "can only be put forward in language that itself is vulnerable to the polarizing tendencies of the contemporary cultural division." *Culture Wars*, 158. Ethicists operating in a prescriptive proceduralist mode, as we have shown, cannot convincingly claim to be neutral.

¹¹¹ Sidney Hook, "The Democratic Way of Life," 287.

Hook's dichotomy is widely shared, but what is worth noting is that in the American culture war *each side is liable to regard the other as an enemy of democracy*. Hence, we find ourselves in a situation in which partisans on both sides agree to norms of civil discourse, and may even call for civility and respectful dialogue, while at the same time considering their opponents beyond the pale of civil disagreement. The culture war is, as Hunter writes, "a struggle over the meaning of America."¹¹² So participants will celebrate the respectful exchange of ideas between those they deem legitimate interlocutors, while viewing millions of other Americans as representatives of an anti-American agenda (fascism, communism, etc.) who merely masquerade as legitimate interlocutors. In this cultural context, the exception becomes the rule, and we continue to preach civility and dialogue while trying to "swiftly deal with" our opponents.¹¹³

To understand this phenomenon, let us consider a model proposed by communication scholar Daniel Hallin. Speaking about media standards, Hallin says there are three spheres: the Sphere of Consensus (commitments deemed uncontroversial within a society), the Sphere of Legitimate Controversy (ideas about which thoughtful, moral people within a society can disagree), and the Sphere of Deviance (opinions deemed, in Hallin's words, "unworthy of being heard").¹¹⁴ According to Hallin, media standards of objectivity and fairness are applied only to debates in which the differing viewpoints are all taken to be within the Sphere of Legitimate Controversy. Individuals might firmly believe in these standards while at the same time believing that some positions are *so well-founded that they ought to be treated as consensus* and other

¹¹² James Davison Hunter, "The Enduring Culture War," in *Is There a Culture War?*, eds. James Davison Hunter and Alan Wolfe (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2006), 14.

¹¹³ Stanley Fish makes a similar point in his incisive deconstruction of the liberal idea of tolerance. See Fish, "Mission Impossible: Setting the Just Bounds between Church and State," *Columbia Law Review* 97, no. 8 (1997).

¹¹⁴ Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 116–18.

positions are *so dangerous that they ought to be treated as deviant*. If a group frames a social conflict as “advocates of equality versus racists,” for example, then in their minds the rules that govern legitimate controversy will not apply to this conflict. Many disagreements in the culture war are framed like this—not as disputes between liberals and conservatives within the Sphere of Legitimate Controversy, but as conflicts between consensus positions and deviant positions. Conflicts are framed, for example, as defenders of scientific truth versus propagandists of pseudoscience, champions of church-state separation versus theocrats, or law-abiding citizens versus financially-motivated agitators. In conflicts framed in these ways, suprademocratic commitments and antidemocratic threats alike make it difficult for the “etiquette of democracy” to restrain immoral communication.

VI.B. Existential Threat

There are three criteria in order for a situation to become a supreme emergency, according to Michael Walzer. These criteria—the three “onlys”—are as follows: “*only* in the face of a far greater immorality, as in the example of a Nazi-like attack on the very existence of a particular community, and *only* at the moment when this attack is near success, and *only* insofar as the immoral response is the only way of holding off that success.”¹¹⁵ Many Americans view their present political situation in precisely these terms. This is not to say that they are *correct* in doing so, as Walzer would point out; appeals to supreme emergency may be hyperbolic and invalid. What is important for our purposes is that people who believe in moral rules for civil engagement, and insist that we ought to treat opponents respectfully, might nonetheless maintain

¹¹⁵ Walzer, *Arguing about War*, 50. Emphasis mine.

that in their struggles against totalitarianism, racism, secularism, or imperialism, “the constraints lose their grip and a certain kind of utilitarianism reimposes itself.”¹¹⁶

Many examples could be found of this reasoning in American social and political conflict. For the sake of brevity, we will consider only four. Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, in his bestselling 2010 book *To Save America*, argues that the Democratic Party’s agenda poses a serious threat to American survival. He writes “The secular-socialist machine [the political left led by President Obama] represents as grave a threat to America as Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union... Time has not run out, but it is running short. It is up to those of us who love our country to save America from the destructive, irreversible transformation that the Left have in store for us.”¹¹⁷ Gingrich compares the present political divide with the situation right before Civil War, saying, “Today, we face a challenge equally grave: whether the United States as we know it will cease to exist.”¹¹⁸ To preserve America’s historic values, Gingrich concludes, Americans need to “stand up and fight.”¹¹⁹

Gingrich argues that the present struggle is not an intramural debate between American political philosophies as the Republican-Democrat divide has been in the past. It is rather a conflict between Americans and “an alien ideology... a movement that fundamentally rejects the traditional American conception of who we are.”¹²⁰ Using Hallin’s terms, Gingrich would place the Obama administration’s platform within the Sphere of Deviance, outside the scope of tolerance and civil debate.

¹¹⁶ Walzer, *Arguing About War*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Newt Gingrich, with Joe DeSantis, *To Save America* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2010), 4–5.

¹¹⁸ Gingrich, *To Save America*, 5.

¹¹⁹ Gingrich, *To Save America*, 34.

¹²⁰ Gingrich, *To Save America*, 2, 6.

Gingrich has repeated his commitment to civility, even giving speeches on civility at universities.¹²¹ But in this book, Gingrich checks off two of Walzer's three criteria for supreme emergency. The threat to the American way of life posed by the left is *imminent* and *existential*. Were someone who shared Gingrich's views to conclude that uncivil tactics were the only way to stop the "secular-socialist machine," then resort to these tactics would be justified by the logic of supreme emergency.

Conservative commentator Evan Sayet argues in a similar vein. In an opinion piece that went viral, Sayet justifies Donald Trump's incivility by using the language of last resort. For the last sixty years, he writes, "While the Left has been taking a knife to anyone who stands in their way, the Right has continued to act with dignity, collegiality, and propriety. With Donald Trump, this all has come to an end. Donald Trump is America's first wartime president in the Culture War." According to Sayet, Republicans have been playing by the rules of civility while Democrats have been using Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*—a book of "pure evil," he adds—as a tactical manual for throttling the Right. Curiously enough, Sayet goes on to praise Trump for "doing exactly what Alinsky suggested his followers do," and "defeating the Left using their own tactics." Sayet reiterates that the "normal rules" are invalid because the Right is fighting a losing battle. He writes, "Do I wish we lived in a time when our president could be 'collegial' and 'dignified' and 'proper'? Of course I do. These aren't those times. This is war. And it's a war that the Left has been fighting without opposition for the past fifty years." For Sayet the

¹²¹ For a video of Gingrich's speech on "Civility in Politics" at East Tennessee State University, see <http://www.yaf.org/videos/newt-gingrich-at-east-tn-state-univ/>.

circumstances of political conflict justify resorting to precisely the same tactics he condemns his opponents for using, tactics in which “nothing is seen as beyond the pale.”¹²²

In similar fashion, some political commentators on the left consider the contemporary American right a threat to America’s continued existence. Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Leonard Pitts Jr., for example, also invokes the Civil War and Cold War as precedents for the current political situation. He goes on to conclude, “Donald Trump represents this country’s gravest existential threat since the end of the Soviet Union.”¹²³ The Trump campaign, Pitts writes, represents a secession movement from objective reality and from the American community, and must be treated as such. In a similar article, *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow writes, “On Election Day, America faces a choice, and it’s not a tough one, but a stark one. It is the difference between tolerance and intolerance. It is the difference between respect and disrespect. It is the difference between a politician with some flaws and a flaw threatening our politics. Donald Trump is America’s existential threat. On Tuesday, America has an opportunity to defend itself.”¹²⁴ For Blow and many others, in *this conflict* against *this enemy*, respect and tolerance are not ideals that govern over the political process impartially. Rather, one side represents respect and tolerance while the other side represents their antitheses.

Recall that Walzer writes regarding supreme emergencies, “We face moral as well as physical extinction, the end of a way of life as well as of a set of particular lives, the disappearance of people like us. And it is then that we may be driven to break through the moral

¹²² Evan Sayet, “He Fights,” *Townhall*, July 13, 2017, <https://townhall.com/columnists/evansayet/2017/07/13/he-fights-n2354580>.

¹²³ Leonard Pitts Jr., “Trump’s the ‘Gravest Existential Threat since the End of the Soviet Union,’” *Miami Herald*, September 27, 2016. <http://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/leonard-pitts-jr/article104540391.html>.

¹²⁴ Charles Blow, “Trump is an Existential Threat,” *New York Times*, November 3, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/03/opinion/campaign-stops/trump-is-an-existential-threat.html?mcubz=3>.

limits that people like us normally attend to and respect.”¹²⁵ Gingrich, Sayet, Pitts, and Blow each see the extinction of the American way of life as at stake in recent presidential elections. These authors argue, and many others agree, that contemporary American politics is a battle for *survival*. And in battles for survival, the ends override the moral boundaries we had set on our means. One political scientist writes of participants in the culture war, “It is not merely that they disagree, but rather that they think that if their opponents prevail, everything that we hold dear will be destroyed. In that context, incivility is a small cost if the gain is winning the ultimate battle.”¹²⁶

Gingrich, Pitts, and Blow are discussing the stakes of presidential elections, but large-scale conflicts like the culture war, class war, or struggles for liberation encompass much more than these elections. These conflicts serve as what experts call “focal conflicts,” in which otherwise minor disputes gain salience by being framed in terms of a major divide.¹²⁷ For example, the culture war takes otherwise disconnected debates—over bakeries in Indiana, high schools in Texas, and record stores in Tennessee—and raises their stakes to the level of ultimate importance.¹²⁸ We see here another parallel between social conflict and military conflict. The Eisenhower letter quoted above, in which Eisenhower opines that “our traditional ideas of international sportsmanship are scarcely applicable,” was written in the context of possible military actions in the islands of Quemoy and Matsu, small islands off the coast of China. In the Cold War, minor struggles like this took on grave significance when interpreted in light of the

¹²⁵ Walzer, *Arguing about War*, 43.

¹²⁶ L. Sandy Maisel, “The Consequences of Uncivil Discourse for the Political Process,” in *Can We Talk? The Rise of Rude, Nasty, Stubborn Politics*, eds. Daniel M. Shea and Morris P. Fiorina, 215.

¹²⁷ See Jeong, *Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis*, 128–29.

¹²⁸ For two good surveys of the various episodes and proxy battles of the culture war, see Hunter’s *Culture Wars* and Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2015).

clash between Western capitalism and Soviet communism. So too, in the social conflict, local disputes over public monuments or invited lecturers can become invested with the same urgency of existential threat. Even conversations between co-workers can be seen as battles within the overarching focal conflict, justifying resort to incivility.

VI.C. The Fog of War

One further complication is the role that unconscious double standards play in adjudicating morality in social conflicts. In one particularly telling chapter, Hunter asks pro-life activists to assess pro-choice rhetoric and vice versa. Members of both movements believe that their side uses justifiable rhetoric and tells the truth, whereas their opponents lie and use manipulative tactics. Each side accuses the other of dishonesty, sloganeering, concealing facts, inflammatory imagery, and indoctrination. The activists Hunter interviews all express a commitment to moral communication, and yet disagree strongly over how to interpret specific speech-acts, resulting in “the irony of failing to see in their own rhetoric the same kinds of distortions they decry in that of their opposition.”¹²⁹

This does not mean that because “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter,” we cannot make normative judgments in contested situations. But in a conflict like this, in which interpretations of moral injunctions are made in light of groups’ ideological commitments, to propound a code of communicative ethics is more likely to give each side ammunition to condemn the other than to promote sober self-examination and change behavior.

¹²⁹ *Before the Shooting Begins*, 63.

To understand this problem, consider the question, “Is it morally permissible to yell ‘Fire!’ in a crowded theater?” Of course, the answer depends entirely on whether or not there is an actual fire. In many social conflicts, what divides groups is substantive disagreements over, as it were, whether or not there is a fire. It is very difficult to regulate communication for both sides in a conflict without interpreting the situation in a way that privileges one side’s interpretation of the issue in question. When this happens, any theorist’s attempt to apply the rules will be read by one group as support for their side against their opponents, and will be regarded by the other group as unwelcome external criticism from someone who fundamentally misunderstands the situation.

For example, consider conservative columnist Thomas Sowell’s statement, “Racism is not dead, but it is on life support—kept alive by politicians, race hustlers, and people who get a sense of superiority by denouncing others as ‘racists.’”¹³⁰ According to Sowell, “race hustlers” like Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, by propagating the myth of systemic racial inequality in America, prevent young blacks from aspiring to greater things.¹³¹ These public figures are guilty not only of exaggeration, racial discrimination, and unjustified *ad hominem* attacks, Sowell contends, but of exacerbating racial divisions and fostering a self-fulfilling prophecy of minority underachievement. It would be difficult to criticize Sowell’s application of the rules governing moral communication without making a judgment on the core issue at question: whether anti-black racism is a systemic problem or not. If one believes racism is not a major problem in America, one will find Sowell’s judgments reasonable; if one believes racism is a pervasive

¹³⁰ “Q&A with Thomas Sowell,” *C-SPAN*, March 26, 2017, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?424091-1/qa-thomas-sowell>.

¹³¹ Thomas Sowell, “Race-Hustling Results,” *Creators Syndicate*, October 22, 2013, <https://www.creators.com/read/thomas-sowell/10/13/race-hustling-results>.

problem, then one will likely conclude that Sharpton and Jackson are using rhetoric appropriate to the situation.

The same dynamic occurs in many other disagreements, including those that make up the “culture war.” For example, take the way communication ethics norms get applied to discourse about homosexuality. If sexual orientation is a trait with which a person is born, then condemnations of homosexuality are discriminatory and those who make these statements are bigots whose views do not deserve a hearing. If, however, sexual orientation is a matter of choice, then calling critics of homosexuality bigots is slanderous and begging the question, and censoring arguments against homosexuality is a totalitarian stifling of dissent. In conditions like this, opponents can agree completely on the moral rules that govern communication (e.g., that hate speech targeted at a person’s identity is wrong, that it is wrong to silence those who disagree with you) but disagree completely about whether a particular speech-act is morally permissible. As Hunter found in his study of the conflict over abortion, often the rules governing moral communication do not transcend the disagreements at the heart of social conflicts but get interpreted in light of those disagreements, fueling rather than restraining the animosity.

The rules in communication ethics are bound to contain ambiguities which will come to the surface as groups interpret them in light of their own goals and commitments. This is unavoidable, and being subject to interpretation is certainly no knock against the rules. But as with the language of just war theory, the language of communication ethics can become facilitative rather than restrictive. Each side justifies its own incivilities as necessary responses to the incivilities of its opponents. Communicative norms ironically get caught up in the escalation process, akin to the irony of both sides in World War I justifying using poison gas because their enemies had broken international law *by using poison gas*.

In the American culture war—a war which both sides blame the other for firing the first shot—both sides justify incivilities for the sake of restoring a just order.¹³² Exaggerations are seen as justified correctives to the distorted version of truth promulgated by the other side. Communicators air their own prejudices in their attempts to warn others of the prejudices of their opponents. Indoctrination is deemed necessary to inoculate young people from the indoctrination they will inevitably receive from the other side, or to cure converts of the brainwashing they have already undergone. Incivilities are advantageously compared to opponents’ tactics and framed as efforts at counter-incivility.

The great philosopher of conflict Carl von Clausewitz noted this ironic tendency for seemingly proportionate reactions to escalate conflict. “Each side,” he writes, “compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes.”¹³³ In the absence of authoritative referees, each side interprets the morality of its communicative tactics in terms of its own interpretation of the rules, and in terms of what reactions are needed to counteract the immorality of the opponent. Given that these interpretations are subject to distortion—Clausewitz says in war “all action takes place, so to speak, in a kind of twilight, which, like a fog or moonlight, often tends to make things seem grotesque and larger than they really are”¹³⁴—both sides justify immoral behavior in their efforts to defend fairness, truth, and justice.

VII. Reconsidering Prescriptive Proceduralism

¹³² For each side claiming that the other side started the culture war, see James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 124, 141.

¹³³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 85.

¹³⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 161.

It would be almost impossible to evaluate whether and to what extent the promulgation of rules and injunctions for ethical communication effectively promotes moral communication and restrains immoral communication. But the analogy with just-war theory suggests that there are significant factors which mitigate the effectiveness of these rules and injunctions in social conflicts. Perhaps the best way to understand the limitations of prescriptive proceduralism, and to synthesize some of my previous points, is to consider the conditions under which prescriptive proceduralism works to restrain immoral actions, and then discuss the degree to which those conditions actualize in social conflict. Once again, as Eagleton defines it, rhetoric is “the process of analyzing the material effects of particular uses of language in particular social conjunctures.” There are five social conjunctures in which prescriptive proceduralism effectively guides and restrains actions.

First, if all parties agree on the rules and there is a referee with the authority to enforce them, then the rules will guide and restrain actions. This is the case with the rules of a sport, for example, but it is largely not the case in international warfare. Although the stigma of breaking international law does play a role in nations’ decision-making, nations either do not feel compelled to follow the strictures of international law or will interpret it to line up with their goals. The same could be said of social conflict; as communication scholars W. Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn write, “The analogy of the referee breaks down, of course, because moral conflicts are not played within the context of agreed-upon rules and with explicit agreements to submit to the judgment of an impartial interpreter of those rules. Moral conflict usually develops in something like a free-market economy, in which participants do everything they know to do that is not counterproductive.”¹³⁵

¹³⁵ W. Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn, *Moral Conflict* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997), 106.

Second, rules and injunctions are useful if the problem is ignorance with how one ought to behave. Consider, for example, if I were to take a trip to Singapore. I want to be respectful to the people I encounter, but I am unfamiliar with how to express respect in Singaporean culture. A guidebook with “Ten Rules of Etiquette in Singapore” would be useful, and reading it would influence how I treat others on my trip. To be sure, ignorance of the appropriate norms of behavior does play a role in immoral conduct in military and social conflicts. But, as I have been arguing, people break moral rules not so much out of ignorance as due to the belief that the ends justify the means in particular situations. Evidence can be found in the many instances in which people who acknowledge or even call others to follow the moral rules also justify breaking these rules at other times.

Third, rules and injunctions serve a role in providing a vocabulary for discussing ethics. For this, we can agree with Walzer that even to hear military leaders talking in terms of “proportionality” and “last resort” is a triumph for just-war theory, since it is evidence that these categories are playing a role in policy decisions. As we have seen, though, it is all too easy for partisans in a conflict to stretch moral terms in ways that evacuate them of significant restraining power. Ethical concepts can also turn into hollow and facilitative verbiage, especially when used selectively and without regard to the traditions, narratives, and casuistry that give them meaning.¹³⁶ Hence, many conflicts are fought bitterly with both sides nonetheless claiming to be bastions of civility, respect, and compassion.

Fourth, and related, prescriptive proceduralism can play a role in forming people’s characters. Stephen Carter, for example, understands civility to be a matter of character

¹³⁶ This is the argument of Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

formation more so than following explicit guidelines; his list of fifteen rules are meant to play a role in this moral training. This is undoubtedly worthwhile, though we must register two caveats. First, we should not be too quick to assume that moral training serves to restrain when deviations from moral rules are taken to be ethically justifiable. As Alexander Downes discovered, civilian victimization in war occurs regardless of the training and military culture of the officers. Second, the existence of the rules *as rules* may impede rather than promote their usefulness in moral training. Daniel Bell makes this case persuasively, arguing that the recovery of just-war theory as character formation requires rejecting the conception of just-war theory as a checklist of rules.¹³⁷ A superficial obedience to the rules can supplant serious reflection on the morality of one's actions.

Fifth, prescriptive procedural injunctions effectively restrain immorality when they are taken to have an authority that trumps individuals' ends. For example, a devout Christian might stand to make a substantial profit from lying, but may refuse to do so because of the ninth commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." When calls for civility are effective, it is because partisans are reminded of higher commitments that relativize their immediate goals. Civility advocates, as we have seen, appeal to religious authorities and the needs of democratic societies in order to restrain incivility. However, the causes people fight for in social conflicts—recall from last chapter "faith, family, and freedom" on the right and "freedom, equality, and inclusion" on the left—are often taken to be ultimate. Hence, partisans reject the interpretations of Civility advocates, consider their own cases exceptional, or appeal to religious and democratic values over religious and democratic morals.

¹³⁷ *Just War as Christian Discipleship*, 79–81 and *passim*.

To revisit Aristotle's analogy, rhetoric functions like medicine. The one offering treatment has to take into account the nature of the malady. With this in mind, we can better understand the limits and possibilities of prescriptive proceduralism as a rhetorical style for facilitating moral communication and understand the specific contribution of this dissertation. We can summarize the previous five points by saying: *To the degree* that the problem is ignorance or an inadequate moral vocabulary, then prescriptive proceduralist ethics may prove useful. Also, when there is an authoritative referee trusted by all parties to interpret and enforce the rules, or when people take the moral authority of the rules to trump their rhetorical goals, then prescriptive proceduralism will be effective. Though in this dissertation I will be arguing for an alternative to prescriptive proceduralism, prescriptive proceduralism still has a place in communication ethics, and calls for civility, respect, and dialogue do occasionally bring about change in behavior.

To the degree that moral disengagement is the problem—especially on a widespread level among a social group—reasserting the rules and enjoining people to follow them is largely not the best rhetorical strategy, and may even drive parties further into incivility. But this does not mean nothing can be done. Many studies have shown that efforts aimed at minimizing dehumanization and misattribution by facilitating intergroup contact will be the most effective treatment.¹³⁸ Greater awareness of the psychological factors at play in conflicts (for example, of diffusion of responsibility and advantageous comparison) may also make it more likely for individuals to examine their own actions, identify maneuvers of moral disengagement, and change their behaviors. Additionally, the arts can provide opportunities for activating moral

¹³⁸ For a survey of decades of findings on the prejudice-reducing effects of intergroup conduct, see Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90, no. 5 (2006).

convictions by dramatically calling into question the euphemistic labeling, moral framing, and disregard and distortion of consequences that occur during conflicts. We could plausibly claim that when calls for civility are actually effective, it is because the stories and examples offered by proponents activate existing moral convictions, not because the injunctions and arguments made by proponents change ethical beliefs. This project of reframing disagreements and creating spaces for intergroup contact is important, though by and large I will not take it up in this dissertation.

To the degree that the problem is the malleability of the rules, the dismissal of external interpretations, and moral framing or euphemistic labeling, then the cultivation of moral virtues will be an essential part of the remedy. *Pace* Wallace, even when “the standards are clearly stated and widely understood,” it still takes virtuous character to describe the situation rightly and discern what justice, respect, and morality look like in this context. Rules do not contain within themselves guides as to how to apply them correctly to particular situations; it takes a person with a well-formed character to properly understand the situation and act rightly within it. Rules, as abstractions, may aid this process of virtue formation but also obscure the need for it. This argument has been made by G.E.M. Anscombe and many who have followed in her footsteps over the last sixty years.¹³⁹ Daniel Bell, in *Just War as Christian Discipleship*, makes the case for an approach to just-war ethics centered on character formation within a community rather than on the promulgation of rules and injunctions.¹⁴⁰ Moral vision, he argues, is required to see through the fog of war. Similarly, in social conflict a commitment to respect and civility

¹³⁹ See, among others, G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 33 (1958); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; John McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979); Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁰ “There is more at stake even in following rules than simply being told what the rules are and being determined to obey them. It is this ‘more’ that just war as a character- or virtue-centered ethic addresses...” Bell, *Just War as Christian Discipleship*, 80.

are not enough—and reasserting their importance will be hollow—without this process of character formation. This process of formation in the virtues is worthwhile, though it will not be the focus of this dissertation.

Finally, and most pressing for our purposes, to the degree that the problem is people deviating from moral means for the sake of ethical ends, an approach to ethical criticism other than prescriptive proceduralism will be needed, one that takes into account means and ends together. It is this approach that will occupy us for the rest of this dissertation.

VIII. Conclusion

In summary, people who are committed to the existence of moral rules in war nonetheless justify breaking these rules. They do this because (1) these rules do not activate due to moral disengagement, (2) people see the rules as inapplicable to a particular conflict or reject the authority of the one interpreting the rules, (3) people reinterpret the rules according to their own interests, or (4) they override the rules for the sake of their ends. These ends fit into three categories: (a) the values threatened by defeat, (b) survival, whether of one's own group, the enemy, or a vulnerable third party, and (c) the preservation by deterrence of a just order in which people abide by the rules. All sides in a military conflict rely on these justifications to justify going beyond their moral codes, often without fully reckoning with the fact that they are doing so. This creates a pattern of escalation in which each side uses the threatening actions of the other side to justify its own transgressions. These same conditions occur in social conflict, including focal conflicts like the American culture war.

As Walzer writes, the great paradox and provocation of war is that “Moral communities make great immoralities morally possible.” This, I have argued, is also characteristic of social

conflicts, including the conflicts that make up the American culture war. Individuals deeply committed to ethical values end up, for the sake of those values, resorting to means that dehumanize others and damage the social climate. People turn to an ethic in which the ends justify the means, often without fully acknowledging that they are doing so. As Hunter writes, “The ends, in other words, always justify forms of coercion. Caught in the logic of this ethical perfectionism, it is easy to see how it is that *liberals eventually become quite illiberal, Christians eventually act in quite un-Christian ways, humanists eventually behave inhumanely, conservatives eventually become insensitive to the traditions they espouse, champions of tolerance become intolerant, and so on.*”¹⁴¹ These ironies paint a rather grim portrait of the culture wars, but, I will argue in the next chapter, they also point us toward an alternative way of approaching communication ethics in social conflict.

¹⁴¹ Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins*, 230.

3. Integral Communication

“An expert judge in the matter has said that one rarely sees anyone who writes humbly about humility, doubtfully about doubt, etc. In other words, one rarely finds an exposition of which it holds true that the exposition is that which is expounded, such that, to take one of his examples, doubt is communicated in a doubting form, which the Greeks did; whereas in our day—how reliable!—one becomes a professor, is knighted, and is married, through communicating ‘doubt about everything’ as an article of faith to believing listeners.”
—Søren Kierkegaard¹

I. Introducing Integral Communication Criticism

As discussed in chapter 2, the major voices in the ethics of advocacy share similarities with comparable voices in the ethics of war and peace. That is to say, the ethical norms we rely on to think about social conflict parallel the ethical norms we rely on to think about military conflict. The Victory perspective, analogous to realism/crusaderism, maintains that a speaker’s ends are subject to ethical judgment, while the means are evaluated only by their effectiveness. For Civility advocates, analogous to the just war tradition, there are moral rules that constrain the means one may adopt in social conflict. Even a speaker with just ends must refrain from relying on unjust means in order to achieve their communicative goals. For Open-mindedness, analogous to Tolstoyan pacifism, the goal of changing another person is an offense to inherent human dignity, hence persuasion is unethical regardless of the rhetorical means one uses.

In this chapter, we will consider an alternative to these three voices, inspired by the tradition of nonviolent direct action, which I am here calling *integral communication criticism* (ICC). According to the logic of ICC, the means and ends of communication are integrally

¹ *For Self-Examination/Judge for Yourself!*, eds. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 119. Kierkegaard is alluding to Blaise Pascal, “Few speak humbly of humility, chastely of chastity, dubiously of skepticism.” *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1995), §655.

related. That is to say, a communicator's specific ends offer us normative resources to evaluate the means the communicator uses to achieve those ends. ICC is a form of communication ethics advocacy distinct from prescriptive proceduralism; since means and ends are interconnected in ICC, communicators are less likely to justify resorting to immoral means in the pursuit of ethical ends. ICC is also a form of rhetorical theorizing attentive to the need for persuasiveness and effectiveness. Explicating ICC and illustrating what it looks like in practice will be the task of the next three chapters, but I can begin by explaining the underlying logic.

A theme reiterated by many nonviolent direct actionists is the integral relationship between means and ends. Mohandas Gandhi writes, "The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree."² Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr. writes, "For in the long run, we must see that the end represents the means in process and the ideal in the making. In other words, we cannot believe, or we cannot go with, the idea that the end justifies the means because the end is preexistent in the means."³

We will explore the nature of this relationship and how it plays out in Gandhi's and King's philosophies in much greater detail in chapter 5. But for now it will suffice to say that one way of attending to the relationship between means and ends is to focus on the communicative dimension of actions. Geoffrey Ostergaard writes that for Gandhi, "means are never merely instrumental; they are always expressive of values."⁴ Drawing on Ostergaard's terms, I argue

² Mohandas Gandhi, *Non-violent Resistance (Satyagraha)* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001), 10.

³ Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 45. Cf. 102, 214.

⁴ Geoffrey Ostergaard, "A Gandhian Perspective on Development," in *A Reader in Peace Studies*, ed. Paul Smoker, Ruth Davies, and Barbara Munske (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1990), 208.

that the *expressive* dimension of means is crucial to understanding the integral relationship between means and ends.⁵

The instrumental value of means has to do with whether and how well the means accomplish the goals for which they are put to use. If I want to heat water to make tea, for example, there are a number of means at my disposal. I can use a copper kettle, an electric kettle, a microwave, or a portable camping stove. One process may take longer than another, but the result is more or less the same. In this case, the relationship between the desired end (hot water) and the available means (kettles, etc.) is merely instrumental.

If, however, I have a visitor at my house attending to the way I make tea, then in addition to merely instrumental considerations, there is an expressive dimension to the means I choose. The means convey something to my companion in addition to what they materially accomplish.⁶ Using a copper kettle may convey to my companion that I am patient and traditional, whereas using a microwave may give the opposite impression. If I heat water by lighting a chair on fire and holding a mug bare-handed over the flames, this act conveys a very different message, even if the resulting tea tastes the same.

The implicit message expressed by the means we choose (within the particular social context we find ourselves in) is of particular relevance to ICC, because this implicit message can either be conducive to our ends or betray them.

Consider the following case. In July 1985, anti-apartheid protests in South Africa reached a fever pitch, to the point where some black protesters were looting and killing people suspected

⁵ In chapter 5, I distinguish between the strong version of the means-ends connection and the weak version, and explain exactly which formulation I defend in this dissertation.

⁶ I make reference at various points to the message an action conveys to an audience, but I do not explore in any depth questions of hermeneutics or the philosophy of meaning. The theoretical framework I am drawing upon here owes a great deal to symbolic interactionism, Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, and the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

of collaborating with the police. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a leader in the anti-apartheid movement, made a series of statements in which he argued that this violence was counter-productive. According to Tutu, since those in power justified apartheid by appealing to the stereotype that blacks were incapable of self-governance, any time black protesters resort to violence or looting they unwittingly lend credence to the very ideology they were trying to overthrow. Though these actions were motivated by anti-apartheid sentiment, they ironically played into the hands of the oppressive apartheid order.⁷ Tutu writes, “By fighting and engaging in violent acts we give others the excuse to say we are not yet ready to govern ourselves.”⁸ Speaking to his countrymen, Tutu said, “We have a cause that is just. We have a cause that is going to prevail. For goodness’s sake, let us not spoil it by the kind of methods that we use.”⁹

Tutu’s response exemplifies integral communication criticism. Tutu observed that in the rhetorical context of the time, what I am calling the *situation*, protesters’ destructive means expressed an *implicit message* to those in positions of power, namely, that repressive measures are necessary to keep uncivilized blacks under control. It conveys this message because these audiences are under *illusions*—by which I mean the various stereotypes, falsehoods, half-truths, distorted frameworks, and misleading generalizations that impede persuasion and transformation—which color their interpretation of the events in question. In this situation, the implicit message conveyed by violent protest, Tutu argued, was at odds with the protesters’ own ends. Tutu was able to evaluate the expressive dimension of the protesters’ actions, drawing resources for normative criticism from within the protesters’ own beliefs and objectives.

⁷ The idea of playing into the oppressor’s hands comes from Gandhi, *Non-violent Resistance*, 65.

⁸ Desmond Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God*, ed. John Allen (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 210.

⁹ Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God*, 98. More on Tutu’s activism can be found in the biography *Rabble-Rouser for Peace* by John Allen (New York: Free Press, 2006). We will discuss in much greater depth the nonviolent direct action methods Tutu advocates in chapter 5.

It is important to recognize that Tutu's ICC is a mode of criticism different from the prevailing voices in the ethics of communication for social change. Tutu criticized these methods of protest, but not by appealing to any standard independent of the protesters' own goals. His criticism is undeniably moral in character, but it does not draw upon a set of context-independent moral rules as is typical of Civility. His criticism is aimed at making the protest more effective, but he does not rely on the "ends justify the means" moral logic typical of Victory. He argues for nonviolence, but a more active, disruptive nonviolence than is typical of Open-mindedness, and a nonviolence rooted in the specific goals of his movement and the distinctive demands of the situation.

Returning to the expressive/instrumental distinction, we can now better understand Gandhi's and King's insistence on the coherence of means and ends. Insofar as an action is communicative, the means we use are themselves expressive of an implicit message, and this message can either support or be at odds with the overarching message we hope to convey. *Integral communication* (IC) comprises symbolic actions in which the implicit message conveyed by the means coheres with the communicators' overarching goals. *Integral communication criticism* (ICC) is the effort to evaluate whether a particular communicative strategy is integral communication, and to propose alternatives that make the means more conducive to the communicator's ends.

Any action can have a communicative dimension, even if its primary purpose is instrumental. W. Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn write, "Communication is not a class name for a type of human action but a way of looking at any form of human activity. All human activities, from our movements within the economic system to those that sustain our religious institutions, whatever else they may be, are also patterns of communication that express and

suppress certain ideas, include and exclude certain people, and facilitate or constrain certain forms of human life.”¹⁰ There are other ethically relevant dimensions of human action, but we will focus primarily on this expressive, communicative dimension.

ICC applies to actions—like tea-making or looting—but it also applies to more straightforwardly communicative endeavors like speaking or writing. We will call all of these “symbolic actions.”¹¹ In speaking or writing, one’s rhetorical style conveys an implicit message. *How* one communicates—questions of style, tone, delivery—accounts for a key part of *what* one communicates. When a person makes an utterance, we can to some degree distinguish the form from the content of their utterance, and recognize that the form itself expresses an implicit message, a sort of secondary content.

When the implicit message of a symbolic action contravenes the communicator’s goals, then the symbolic action involves *self-betraying communication* (SBC). SBC is the opposite of integral communication, though like “daytime” and “nighttime” they rest on a spectrum and the difference is a matter of degree. Self-betraying communication occurs when the intended goal of the communicator is frustrated, impeded, or undermined by the means that communicator uses to achieve this goal. It is not synonymous with sarcasm, in which the speaker says one thing but knowingly means another. Nor is it synonymous with lying, in which the speaker intentionally deceives the audience. Rather, self-betraying communication occurs when the means of communication convey a message at odds with the communicator’s ends. SBC occurs when (and

¹⁰ W. Barnett Pearce and Stephen W. Littlejohn, *Moral Conflict: When Social Worlds Collide* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997), ix–x.

¹¹ Every action with a communicative dimension counts as a symbolic action, including simple verbal actions (like saying “thank you”), functional actions that nonetheless convey meaning (like wearing a sweater in public), prolonged significant actions (like giving your roommate the silent treatment), and more dramatic actions (like firing torpedoes at the *Lusitania*).

to the degree which) the communicator's own persuasive approach, within its context and taking into account the audience's ideas and preconceptions, subverts the communicator's objective.

In instances of SBC, the *how* of communication has a marked effect on *what* actually gets communicated, and that effect is one of both undermining and revealing. Self-betraying communication is "betraying" in two senses: operating against the intentions of the agent, and revealing something that was not consciously intended to be revealed, something that upon reflection the speaker would not want to convey. To understand this second sense, consider a rather transparent bluff, where the poker player makes an overly cocky remark that cues everyone in to the weakness of his hand. In such cases we say, "He's given himself away" or "His tone betrays him."

Examples abound. Consider a flight attendant who says, quivering, "There's no need to panic!" to otherwise tranquil group of passengers. Her intention to keep people calm is subverted by her tone, and the very fact that she felt obliged to say this lets the passengers know that there is indeed some cause for alarm. "Damning with faint praise" is another variety of SBC. A weak compliment, even if intended as sincere praise, can convey that the speaker is in fact critical.

Given that speakers' goals are often rather transparent and their principal objective is often to advocate for a specific viewpoint, SBC can occur when the form of speech is at odds with the viewpoint being advocated. Hence, in the epigraph to this chapter, the particular form of irony when one refuses to "speak humbly about humility" also falls under the category of self-betraying communication. Here one is preaching one thing but doing another; SBC is not conceptually distant from hypocrisy. We should not apply this Kierkegaardian logic in a flat way—there's nothing necessarily self-betraying about quickly telling someone to slow down, for

example.¹² Additionally, in order to be IC, the implicit message need not be the same as the intended persuasive content, it only needs to be compatible with the persuasive goal.¹³

SBC conveys an implicit message that undermines communicators' goals, often by contravening other messages that communicator wishes to convey. In IC, the implicit messages and the explicit messages work together toward the same end, whereas in SBC the implicit messages and the explicit messages work at cross purposes. As an analogy, imagine a large lever. To the degree that a symbolic action is SBC, the communicator is pulling down on the lever with one hand while pushing up on the lever with the other hand. The communicator may feel like they are working very hard, and may even succeed in pulling down the lever, but the rhetorical forces they employ work against one another. SBC is thus less likely to bring about the desired change in attitudes and behavior in one's audiences than IC, for the same reason that sending mixed messages is less persuasive than sending a clear, coherent, and consistent message.¹⁴ SBC is more discordant, more equivocal, and more open to interpretations at odds with the communicator's intentions, especially (as in the Tutu example) when one's implicit messages play into the very ideologies one is attempting to dismantle. Thus, as a general rule, we can expect that in the long run IC will be more effective than SBC at bringing about the desired change in attitudes and behaviors.

The previous sentence is full of qualifications, and for good reason. Human communication is messy and complicated, and making law-like statements about what will

¹² Consider a librarian who talks in a library only to tell noisy patrons not to talk in libraries. There's nothing inherently self-betraying about that, although if the librarian began a long oration on the topic of silence in libraries, it would quickly become laughable.

¹³ I discuss this in greater length in my discussion of Barbara Deming's "two-handed communication" in chapter 5.

¹⁴ Sending mixed messages is, for some ends, a viable persuasive strategy. If, for example, one wants to beguile or confuse another person, sending mixed messages might work. This is part of the art of seduction (I'm told). Also, as we will see in later chapters, it is sometimes necessary to express messages that initially seem to be at odds with one another but can be reconciled only as part of a higher synthesis.

necessarily happen in communication is foolhardy.¹⁵ ICC does not permit exactness or certitude. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what a rhetor's goals are (and they are usually plural), what implicit messages a symbolic action sends to various audiences (again, usually plural), whether those implicit messages are conducive to those ends, and what other factors are in play in audiences' minds that inform their responses. For this reason, ICC needs to be demonstrated rather than simply defined, and the task of the next few chapters will be to elaborate and illustrate how integral communication criticism works in specific situations for specific ends. With those caveats in mind, it might nonetheless be helpful to distill ICC to a template or algebraic formula, which communicators pursuing a variety of ends can use:

If one's goals are _____,
in a situation of _____,
in which the following illusions threaten to obscure one's message: _____, then
communicating in _____ ways will be self-betraying because it conveys the implicit
message _____ which is at odds with one's goals,
and communicating in _____ ways will be integral because it conveys the implicit
message _____ which is conducive to one's goals.
We can reasonably expect that, in the long run, integral communication will be more
effective and—if our ends are moral—more moral than self-betraying communication.

Stated in this way, ICC may seem to be nothing more than the familiar notion that communicators should avoid transparent ironies that discredit their claims. There is a grain of truth to this; ICC is, to borrow William James's phrase, "a new name for some old ways of thinking."¹⁶ The distinctive claim of this dissertation is that ICC can play a central role in the development of an approach to communication that weaves together concern for rhetorical effectiveness with concern for moral integrity. Gandhi, King, and other major figures working for justice in social conflict have guided their campaigns using reasoning closer to ICC than to

¹⁵ This is the argument of Mary John Smith, *Persuasion and Human Action: A Review and Critique of Social Influence Theories* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1982). Smith argues that we can formulate general "rules" about communication patterns but not "laws" of necessary cause and effect.

¹⁶ William James, *Pragmatism* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1995), iii.

the prescriptive proceduralism of Civility, the instrumentalism of Victory, or the nonjudgmentalism of Open-mindedness.

II. Style is Substance

ICC is my attempt to explicate an insight that dates back to at least the time of Aristotle, namely that we cannot treat style as mere ornamentation which can in all cases be safely dispensed with in the pursuit of content.¹⁷ It is easy to downplay style, insisting that how one says or does something is not as important as what one says or does. In politics, for instance, a candidate or pundit's rhetoric is often seen as immaterial when compared with their favored policies or affiliations. Your position is the important thing, not how you talk about it.

Perhaps for different reasons, matters of form and style are relatively marginalized in many fields in the humanities. In his treatment of the importance of style for philosophy, Lawrence Hinman reflects, "It is always possible in principle, so the dominant view suggests, to separate the position being expressed from the style the author employs in using it."¹⁸ Hinman states that this dominant view is rarely explicitly articulated, but is rather assumed in much of contemporary philosophy. This tacit assumption that style can be discarded in the pursuit of understanding is, as Hinman writes, "in force in the daily teaching and writing of philosophy."¹⁹ It is generally assumed that "a philosopher's style is ultimately not integral to the position which he advances,"²⁰ and the same could justly be said of theologians, political theorists, and ethicists.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004).

¹⁸ Lawrence Hinman, "Philosophy and Style," *The Monist* 63, no. 4 (1980): 512.

¹⁹ Hinman, 513. Hinman's three conclusions in this essay are in agreement with the argument of this chapter, "First, there is a reciprocal relationship between style and content in a philosophical position: the range of possible styles is determined by the content of a philosopher's position, and the choice of a particular style determines the limits of what can be said. Second, a change in one's philosophical position may well demand a corresponding change in one's style of philosophizing. Third, it is possible for a style to be wrong, i.e., a given style of philosophizing may be inappropriate to the content which is being expressed." Hinman, "Philosophy and Style," 514. This third conclusion suggests what I am here calling SBC.

²⁰ Hinman, "Philosophy and Style," 512.

By contrast, I argue that style is at least in many cases integral to the content of a piece of rhetoric. Four caveats need to be mentioned. First, I am not implying that we need to pay attention to style at the expense of content. Second, at times, the contribution style makes is negligible and does not deserve mention or analysis. Third, it is not true that for any given message there is only one appropriate medium. After all, one can say “I love you” through a song, a poem, a declaration, a kiss, or even a glance. Fourth, in this chapter and the following one I make use of a number of terms that I do not define or distinguish anything approaching proper analytical rigor. My point is not to provide a test by which we can specify precisely whether or not communication is self-betraying or integral, only to demonstrate that attending to this question can guide communicators in their efforts to craft moral and persuasive symbolic actions.

For the rest of this chapter, we will focus on two writers who exemplify ICC in practice—Paulo Freire and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell. Chapter 4 is a similar analysis of Søren Kierkegaard in which I further elaborate the logic of ICC. In chapter 5 we will turn to the tradition of nonviolent direct action, paying particular attention to how theorist-practitioners like Tutu use reasoning akin to ICC to guide their choice of methods and the tenor of their speech. After seeing what self-betraying communication and integral communication look like in their diverse contexts and with their different goals, in the sixth and final chapter we will apply ICC to Christianity in situations of social conflict. As mentioned, ICC has an “if, then” structure: if your goal is *this*, then *these* symbolic actions will be most conducive; if *this* is the message you want to send, then *this* style will be self-betraying. The purpose of the following analyses is threefold: first, to illustrate ICC in greater detail so readers (even those with goals that differ significantly from these authors’) can apply it in their situations. Second, readers whose goals are akin to these

authors' can reason analogously from these authors' arguments to their own situations. If readers disagree strongly with, for example, Freire's arguments, hopefully readers can still get a clearer sense of what it looks like to do integral communication criticism. To the extent readers' own goals are similar to Freire's, however, they might find Freire's case persuasive and try to employ similar methods in their own communicative encounters. Third, in each of the cases I discuss in this dissertation, a more dialogical style that allows room for the voice of the interlocutor is found to be more conducive to the rhetor's ends than a monological style that silences or ignores interlocutors. An argumentative thread that runs through this dissertation is that symbolic actions that challenge preconceptions and invite response (even critical response) are more effectual for many worthwhile communicative pursuits.

III. "It is Necessary to Trust": Paulo Freire on Liberating Communication

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, writing in the middle of the twentieth century, sympathized with radicals fomenting revolution in South America. He argued, however, that the methods used by many of these revolutionary groups employed self-betraying communication. Though their goal was to liberate the oppressed masses from the power of the oppressive elites, their style of communication worked against their stated goals. Freire spells out how this happens—and what authentically liberating communication looks like—in his landmark philosophy of education book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

According to Freire, part of the insidious nature of societal oppression is the oppressed people's internalization of a self-image imposed on them by their oppressors. This takes place through the perpetuation of what Freire calls "myths," close to what I am calling illusions. Even if in reality the poor, rural population was denied any opportunity to improve their socio-economic status, they nonetheless often come to accept the myth that they are poor because they

are too lazy, not smart enough, or in some other way undeserving of wealth. Oppressors—knowingly or unknowingly—spread these myths to justify their own exclusive possession of economic and political power. These oppressors rely not just on the threat of physical violence to keep the status quo, but the prevalence of myths that convince the oppressed they have no alternatives.²¹

Someone hoping to challenge the system of oppression, then, cannot do so without challenging the false consciousness imposed on the oppressed. The oppressed need to come to the realization that they are *worthy of* and *capable of* political action on their own behalf. This was Paulo Freire’s task in the 1960s, and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is his subsequent reflections on his own practice and philosophy of teaching.²²

Freire described his project as “humanization,” that is, teaching people in such a way that those people come to a full awareness of their status as human beings.²³ For Freire in South America in the 1960s, this meant going into villages and favelas and teaching peasants how to read and write. While literacy was an important component of this process, Freire emphasized that students must not simply learn how to write words but must learn the power of words. The power of reading is connected to the ability to understand the world one lives in, the socio-economic circumstances that influence one’s life. The power of writing is connected to the power of organizing and bringing about transformation. If students are not shown how to make

²¹ Freire defines oppression by saying, “Any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression.” *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), 40. According to his diagnosis, in the 1960s a significant part of the Brazilian population were being oppressed by dominant elites.

²² “I write about what I do... my books are as if they were theoretical reports of my practice.” Freire, quoted in Daniel Schugurensky, *Paulo Freire* (London: Continuum, 2011), 51.

²³ In the first sentence of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire describes humanization as “man’s central problem.” *Pedagogy*, 27.

language a tool for changing their world, then even if they can read they are still alienated from the full exchange of ideas and demands that *literacy* (in the full sense) offers. Freire writes,

As an event calling forth the critical reflection of both the learners and the educators, the literary process must relate speaking the word to transforming reality, and to man's role in this transformation. Perceiving the significance of that relationship is indispensable for those learning to read and write if we are really committed to liberation. Such a perception will lead the learners to recognize a much greater right than that of being literate. They will ultimately recognize that, as men, they have the right to have a voice.²⁴

For Freire, this revolutionary education is not the mere extension of a new skill to peasants, but a full participation in their humanization.

To understand Freire's commitment here, we have to look at his anthropology. According to Freire, part of what it means to be human is to be engaged in *praxis*, a dialectical process of action and reflection.²⁵ Humans are essentially communicative creatures capable of identifying problems, cooperating to address them, recognizing needs, and acting in a creative way to respond to those needs. In a series of distinctions, Freire distinguishes human capacities from merely animal tendencies. Animals have "contacts," but only humans can have "relationships." Animals relate to the world through "reflex," humans relate to the world through "reflection." Humans can identify and take responsibility for their role in the unfolding history of the world.²⁶ To be fully human, then, is to be not merely adapted to the world but to be integrated with the world. This is the crux of Freire's anthropology; he writes, "*Integration* with one's context, as distinguished from *adaptation*, is a distinctly human activity. Integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality *plus* the critical capacity to make choices and to transform

²⁴ Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 13.

²⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 119.

²⁶ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury, 1973), 3–6, cf. *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 6.

that reality.”²⁷ The powers of recognition, communication, and creativity are each aspects of what it means to be integrated. One needs all of these capacities in order to be fully human, that is, in order to not merely adapt to the world but to work to change it.

In Freire’s analysis, these distinctly human capacities have been effaced and submerged through oppression. “To the extent that man loses the ability to make choices and is subjected to the choices of others,” Freire writes, “to the extent that his decisions are no longer his own because they result from external prescriptions, he is no longer integrated. Rather, he has adapted.”²⁸ The myths and illusions propagated by the oppressors do not allow for any creative, collaborative response but explain the nature of the world and demand that the oppressed adapt to that explanation. To the extent that oppressed people internalize these myths and adapt to them, they become dehumanized—in Freire’s terminology, they see themselves as objects rather than full subjects.

Freire was not alone in his desire to liberate South American peasants from oppression. But he observed that many of the attempts of revolutionary groups to liberate the oppressed ironically contributed to their dehumanization. “Paradoxically,” he writes, many who espouse the cause of liberation “utilize the same instrument of alienation in what they consider an effort to liberate.”²⁹ Aware of this tendency, Freire’s work develops a revolutionary method of education that goes beyond SBC. As Freire insists throughout his work, “A project’s method cannot be dichotomized from its content and objectives, as if methods were neutral and equally appropriate for liberation or domination.”³⁰ This is to say, a liberating message demands a liberating form of

²⁷ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 4.

²⁸ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 4.

²⁹ *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 66, cf. 65.

³⁰ Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 44. Cf. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 53, “When men are already dehumanized, due to the oppression they suffer, the process of their liberation must not employ the methods of dehumanization.”

communication. According to Freire, this truly liberating communication differs from traditionally accepted modes of communication in three overlapping ways.

First, liberating communication invites critical reflection. This derives from Freire's anthropology in which what it means to be human is to engage in *praxis*.³¹ Humanizing communication, then, invites the audience to reflect upon an idea and relate it to their own lives. It encourages them to practice their humanity; in Freire's terms, it ennobles the audience by treating them as Subjects instead of mere objects. Insofar as a mode of communication proscribes, supersedes, or bypasses the audience's reflective-active process, it is dehumanizing regardless of the intentions of the communicator. For Freire, the clearest example of this kind of communication is propaganda; he writes, "Whatever its content—commercial, ideological, or technological, propaganda is always used for 'domestication.'" ³² Propaganda tells the masses what they need to believe and do, thereby reinforcing the myth that the masses do not know anything, that they are pawns in the game between the establishment and the revolutionary leadership, that their processes of reflection and decision-making are irrelevant. "To alienate men from their own decision-making," that is, to convey that the decision has already been made on their behalf and they just need to act, "is to change them into objects."³³ Hence, propaganda as a form of communication, regardless of the content, expresses an implicit message at odds with the goals of humanization and liberation.

To be more precise, demanding action without inviting reflection is to treat humans as if they were trained animals.³⁴ As we have discussed, for Freire the authentically human activity is

³¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 58, 119–20.

³² Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 97.

³³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 73, cf. 61.

³⁴ Freire writes that animals are only capable of adaptation, whereas humans are capable of integration. Modes of communication that thus simply present an explanation of the world and expect audiences to accept it uncritically demand animal reaction and preclude human response. See *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 28ff, and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 134–35.

praxis, a consciously world-transforming, critical, cooperative process of action and reflection. Freirean dialogue encourages this *praxis* by creating space for the audience to reflect, question, collaborate, and integrate. By contrast, modes of communication that discourage such creative *praxis* in favor of mere reaction, mere repetition, or mere passivity are dehumanizing. Freire writes, “To substitute monologue, slogans, and communiqués for dialogue is to attempt to liberate the oppressed with the instruments of domestication.”³⁵ These modes of communication, regardless of how revolutionary their message, condition people rather than empowering them.

Rather than liberating, revolutionary leaders’ attempts to manipulate the masses with propaganda and demagoguery are self-betraying. Freire does not mince words about this; discussing “leaders who deny *praxis* to the oppressed,” he states, “By imposing their word on others, they falsify that word and establish a contradiction between their methods and their objectives. If they are truly committed to liberation, their action and reflection cannot proceed without the action and reflection of others.”³⁶ We see here the second sense of “self-betraying,” since Freire implies that these revolutionary leaders are not truly committed to liberation. By utilizing the dehumanizing communication practices of the oppressor, these leaders reveal their hidden preoccupation with becoming oppressors themselves.³⁷ Their explicit intention is undermined by the oppressive tendencies disclosed by their symbolic actions. For activists like this, as Freire says, “The discrepancy between intention and practice would be resolved in favor of practice.”³⁸ No matter how much it glorifies “the common man,” hollow populist rhetoric that does not invite reflection functions more to dehumanize than to liberate.

³⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 52.

³⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 120.

³⁷ “Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people—they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress.” *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 179. Freire refused to apply the name “revolution” to these anti-dialogical movements, insisting that they are nothing more than coups, see *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 122; *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 41ff.

³⁸ *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 47.

Second, liberating communication is rooted in listening. Essential to Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" is his insistence that teachers listen to their students throughout the entire educational process. At the beginning, teachers listen in order to understand the needs and challenges of the students and tailor their pedagogy accordingly. "We will have nothing to teach," Freire repeated, "if we do not learn from and with you."³⁹ In the middle of the educational process, teachers listen as a way of helping students find their voices, find increasingly authentic ways of expressing their dreams, hopes, and commitments to action. At the end of the educational process, teachers listen so they can join their voice with the voices of the students, can work alongside them in denouncing oppression and announcing freedom.⁴⁰

Beyond all of this, though, for Freire listening has immediate political significance.⁴¹ To understand why, we need to consider that one of the conditions of oppression is a "culture of silence" imposed on the oppressed.⁴² According to Freire, those in power—typically the urban elites—do not truly hear the voice of the largely illiterate rural poor. They are able to make decisions without having to attend to the actual hopes, ideas, and demands of the masses. Elites construct a false "voice" for the poor and conform any actual human voice from the poor to this predetermined myth. Hence, in an oppressive system, the oppressed class "is by definition a silent society. Its voice is not an authentic voice, but merely an echo of the voice of the metropolis."⁴³ By definition, then, an oppressive society is one in which the masses do not have a voice and thus do not have power.⁴⁴ To alter these circumstances takes political action, perhaps

³⁹ Quoted in Daniel Schugurensky, *Paulo Freire*, 79.

⁴⁰ Denunciation and annunciation are themes found throughout Freire's work; for one example, see *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 20–21.

⁴¹ Listening (and thus dialogue) also has existential significance for Freire. To understand the relationship between listening and humanization, see *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 76ff.

⁴² This is a key theme of Freire's *Cultural Action for Freedom*, cf. 3–4, 9, 13, 32–34.

⁴³ Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 34.

⁴⁴ As Carolyn Heilbrun defines it, "Power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter." In Rebecca Chopp, *The Power to Speak* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 2.

even political revolution, but it also takes a process of humanization. Insofar as years of being silenced has conditioned the consciousness of the masses, causing them to understand themselves as voiceless, their self-understanding needs to be transformed in the process of revolutionary organization. Giving his oppressed students the opportunity to speak their minds was not simply a teaching technique for Freire but a way of challenging “the masses’ fatalistic perception of reality,”⁴⁵ that is, the internalized belief that the oppressed cannot speak an effectual word.

Consequently, Freire’s education of the oppressed was a form of preparing students to participate in democracy. In his classrooms, students exchanged ideas with each other and with the teacher. Rather than being told to conform to a predetermined syllabus, the students created the course alongside the teacher as the course transpired. Instead of following the strictures of a primer handed down to them, as had been the norm in adult literacy education, they were given power to collaborate and take control over their own education. For Freire, by making his classrooms small-scale democracies, he enabled the students to develop the attitudes, self-perceptions, and dialogical skills necessary for active, engaged democratic citizens. “They could be helped to learn democracy through the exercise of democracy,” Freire writes, “for that knowledge, above all others, can only be assimilated experientially.”⁴⁶ Freire was critical of revolutionary proponents of democracy who hypocritically promulgated their message in ways that did not allow for debate. He writes,

One subverts democracy (even though one does this in the name of democracy) by making it irrational; by making it rigid in order ‘to defend it against totalitarian rigidity’; by making it hateful, when it can only develop in the context of love and respect for persons; by closing it, when it only lives in openness; by nourishing it with fear when it must be courageous; by making it an instrument of the powerful

⁴⁵ Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 37.

⁴⁶ *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 36. Schugurensky summarizes this well, “Education for democracy cannot be separated from the practice of democracy.” Schugurensky, *Paulo Freire*, 54.

in the oppression of the weak; by militarizing it against the people; by alienating a nation in the name of democracy.⁴⁷

In a display of integral communication, Freire's efforts to bring democracy proceed in a democratic way, including listening to the voices of one's audience and working together with them to discern the best way forward. The voice that preaches revolution, liberation, and democracy cannot drown out the voice of the audience without undermining itself. These ideals cannot simply be spoken into being, they must be listened into being.

Third, and related, trust is an essential aspect of truly liberating communication.⁴⁸ There are a number of reasons why trust is a major theme throughout Freire's writings, but we will focus on only one here. For Freire, trust is required if one is going to maintain the practice of collaboration and not devolve into a posture either of authoritarianism or of paternalistic "generosity."⁴⁹ Unlike the other aspects of Freire's thought we have discussed, this is not just a matter of the connection between the medium and message in a situation of oppression. Trust pertains to the whole outlook of the people involved in the dialogue toward one another. One cannot trust in a strategic way, trust by definition has to be a commitment of one person to commune with the other person. Freire believed that feigned trust would not be sufficient to sustain the ongoing practices of dialogue. For Freire, authentic dialogue is a lengthy and vulnerable process of listening to another, sharing one's own vision of a more just world, and working alongside them to create such a world. If a communicator does not authentically trust their interlocutors, their real prejudices and ulterior motives will come to the surface in the way

⁴⁷ *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 58. Freire writes elsewhere, "To glorify democracy and silence the people is a farce; to discourse on humanism and to negate man is a lie." *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 80.

⁴⁸ *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 46–47, 78ff, 169. Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 164.

⁴⁹ For Freire's fascinating critique of generosity, see *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 46–47, 78–79.

they communicate. To use Freire's language, if one sees oneself as working *for* the oppressed, sooner or later this will impede one's ability to work *with* the oppressed.⁵⁰

Freire's vision of revolutionary communication is a long process of committed dialogue with the oppressed in an open exchange of ideas, dreams, grievances, and plans. Through this process, both the educator and the students are humanized, and educator and students alike find their voice. "To achieve this praxis," he writes, "it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiqués, monologues, and instructions."⁵¹ The process of revolutionary communication brings to the surface the image of the oppressed maintained by the revolutionary. If this image is condescending or mistrustful, that will emerge in the communication process as a barrier to democratic collaboration. If the image is trusting and ennobling, that will emerge in the communication process in the form of humanizing dialogue. Ultimately, this means that humanization is not transitive, it is not one person making another human. Rather, humanization is the coming into shared awareness of a prior trust, of a growing belief that each person is worth hearing, intrinsically valuable, and capable of changing the world.

IV. "All Participate and Lead": Karlyn Kohrs Campbell on Feminist Communication

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's article "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation" is the first major work of feminist rhetorical theory.⁵² A professor of rhetoric who wrote in the wake of second-wave feminism, Campbell sought to make sense of rhetorical trends found in feminist literature

⁵⁰ The for/with distinction is essential for Freire, and he relies on it throughout his writings. See, for example, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 33; *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 15.

⁵¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 53.

⁵² Foss, Foss, and Griffin, *Feminist Rhetorical Theories*, introduction.

and practice. Through this analysis, she made normative claims about how the medium and message— what Campbell calls the “style” and “substance,” or what I have been calling “the how” and “the what” of communication—are interrelated for feminist speech.⁵³

“I presume,” she writes, “that the style and substance of a genre of rhetoric are interdependent. Stylistic choices are deeply influenced by subject-matter and context, and issues are formulated and shaped by stylistic strategies.”⁵⁴ As with Freire, the substance of a symbolic action is reflected in the mode of its expression; the goal that is to be accomplished in the symbolic action is reflected in the means of communication used to accomplish it. From this general remark, Campbell turns to study the particular “fusion of substantive and stylistic features”⁵⁵ that constitutes feminist rhetoric.

Campbell shows how the style and substance of feminist rhetoric are interconnected by identifying three contrasts between distinctively feminist rhetoric and traditional understandings of rhetoric. Summarizing her argument, she writes,

The rhetoric of women’s liberation is distinctive stylistically in rejecting certain traditional concepts of the rhetorical process—as persuasion of the many by an expert or leader, as adjustment or adaptation to audience norms, and as directed toward inducing acceptance of a specific program or a commitment to group action. This rather ‘anti-rhetorical’ style is chosen on substantive grounds because rhetorical transactions with these features encourage submissiveness and passivity in the audience—qualities at odds with a fundamental goal of feminist advocacy—self-determination.⁵⁶

⁵³ In saying “feminist speech” or “feminist rhetoric,” I am here referring exclusively to Campbell’s conception of the rhetoric of women’s liberation. Though Campbell’s approach is not the only theory of feminist rhetoric, her article represents a strand of thought within feminist rhetorical theory that spans from the early “consciousness-raising” movement in the late 1960s through the work of Sally Miller Gearhart, Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Cindy L. Griffin in more recent years.

⁵⁴ Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation: An Oxymoron,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59, no. 1 (1973): 75.

⁵⁵ Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation,” 75.

⁵⁶ Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation,” 78.

That is to say, many traditional forms of rhetoric are self-betraying when used to advocate for women's liberation. If the social problem feminists seek to remedy is that women are told what to do without having a say in the matter, then feminist leaders cannot tell women what they need to do is fight for their rights without letting them have a say in the matter. To do so would undermine "the fundamental goal of feminist advocacy" by relying on means incommensurate with the end of self-determination. With this irony in mind, Campbell illustrates three ways traditional rhetoric differs from feminist rhetoric.

First, unlike traditional rhetoric which presupposes an authoritative, active speaker and a less informed, passive audience, feminist rhetoric takes place in an atmosphere of mutuality. Drawing on the feminist tradition of "consciousness-raising"⁵⁷ groups, Campbell describes the creation of rhetorical spaces in which everyone present is free to express their personal experiences and reactions. In these groups, which serve for Campbell as a paradigm for feminist communication, "There is no leader, rhetor, or expert. All participate and lead; all are considered expert."⁵⁸ This practice reflects the goal of consciousness-raising groups, which especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s helped many women realize that the issues they face were shared by others. Campbell writes, "The goal is to make the personal political: to create awareness (through

⁵⁷ Consciousness-raising (CR) groups were a vital part of early second-wave feminism as women came together to discover which issues were truly "women's issues." Though there were charismatic spokeswomen for women's liberation in that time, they were not setting an agenda to be followed to the letter by obedient disciples. Rather, women were liberated by recognizing the inequalities in their own experiences, sharing those experiences and their feelings about them with others, and collectively discerning plans of action. Feminism in this time was not strictly the implementation of a theory, but as CR pioneer Kathie Sarachild writes, "Our feelings will lead us to theory, our theory to our action, our feelings about that action to new theory and then to new action." ("A Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising," 78). See Anita Shreve's *Women Together, Women Alone: The Legacy of the Consciousness-Raising Movement* (New York: Viking, 1989) for an account of CR's history and legacy. For the theory behind CR and the guidelines for its practice, see Kathie Sarachild, "A Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising," in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists* (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970), 78–80, and "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon" in *Feminist Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1978), 144–50.

⁵⁸ Campbell, "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation," 79.

shared experiences) that what were thought to be personal deficiencies and individual problems are common and shared, a result of their position as women.”⁵⁹

The spread of the women’s liberation movement in the sixties and seventies was not the spread of a doctrine but the blossoming of a million realizations—that one woman is not alone in her struggles, that the oppressive order is not necessary, that sharing her experience can open up new vistas for others.⁶⁰ Fostering these realizations, the “creation of awareness” Campbell describes, is not the sort of goal that traditional rhetoric is designed to serve. In traditional rhetoric, discovery (*inventio*) is something the rhetor does before delivering a speech.⁶¹ In feminist rhetoric, by contrast, discovery is something that happens collectively as a result of speaking and listening between people. In traditional rhetoric, (1) the orator assumes that the audience does not know the problem, (2) tells the audience what is wrong and what is needed, and (3) tells the audience how they should feel about it. In feminist rhetoric on the “consciousness-raising” model, however, (1) communicators begin with the assumption that the listeners are authorities on the subject of their own life experience,⁶² (2) the communication process itself is vital to uncovering what is wrong and what is needed,⁶³ and (3) feelings are a

⁵⁹ Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation,” 79.

⁶⁰ See Shreve, *Women Together, Women Alone*.

⁶¹ Though “traditional rhetoric” is far from monolithic, the conception of rhetoric Campbell uses as a foil will be familiar to readers of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and their medieval and modern followers. Campbell recognizes that “traditional rhetoric” is a construct; her goal is not to say that feminist rhetoric is utterly unique in the history of rhetoric but that its assumptions and conventions stand in stark contrast with mainstream popular and scholarly understandings of rhetoric. For histories of the rhetorical tradition in question, see Thomas M. Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); James A. Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*, 2nd ed. (Needham Heights, MA: Pearson, 2001); George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric in its Christian and Secular Tradition*, Second Edition (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Brian Vickers, *In Defense of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

⁶² “Everything we have to know, have to prove, we can get from the realities of our own lives.” Kathie Sarachild, “Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon,” 145.

⁶³ “Consciousness-raising was seen as both a method for arriving at the truth and a means for action and organizing.” Kathie Sarachild, “Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon,” 147.

guide to the truth, and ought to be listened to rather than manipulated.⁶⁴ Though the explicit practice of consciousness-raising groups does not exhaust feminist communication, the spirit of the consciousness-raising paradigm runs throughout feminist rhetoric even in more traditional rhetorical forms like the essays or addresses.⁶⁵ The dialogical, personal, and affective characteristics of feminist rhetoric are, for Campbell, neither accidental features nor rhetorical shortcomings but are stylistic expressions of substantive feminist commitments.

Second, while traditional rhetoric aims at satisfying the expectations of the audience, feminist rhetoric aims at challenging those expectations and making the audience aware of those (often implicit) expectations. Campbell refers to this as “violating the reality structure” of the audience.⁶⁶ Much feminist rhetoric aims at offending the sensibilities of audiences in an attempt to get audiences to reflect on their own sensibilities. Advocates of women’s liberation are not shocking just for the sake of being shocking, but rely on provocative rhetoric to call into question the taboos, assumptions, and social norms of their audience. Campbell gives the example of feminists referring to God as “she.”⁶⁷ This controversial act makes hearers confront their own presuppositions about the maleness of God. Even if they would insist that God is neither male nor female, their instinctive hesitance or repulsion at hearing female language for the Divine shows the grip this patriarchal image has on their “reality structure.” If traditional rhetors seek to win the audience’s adherence by avoiding saying anything offensive, feminist rhetors sometimes seek to shake the audience out of an oppressive imagination by offending their sense of order and

⁶⁴ “We assume that our feelings are telling us something from which we can learn... that our feelings mean something worth analyzing... that our feelings are saying something political.” Kathie Sarachild, “A Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising,” 78 (ellipses in original).

⁶⁵ Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation,” 81.

⁶⁶ Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation,” 81.

⁶⁷ Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation,” 82.

propriety.⁶⁸ This refusal to conform to the goal of winning over an audience does not mean that persuasion is abandoned in favor of sensationalism. “Violations of norms may shock initially,” Campbell writes, “but ultimately they will be recognized as articulating the contradictions inherent in ‘the female role.’”⁶⁹ Insofar as feminist beliefs in the equality of women clash with a society’s prevailing ideology, feminist rhetoric cannot fully conform to audience’s expectations. Even in its most reformist and moderate formulations, feminist advocacy must maintain some confrontational edge.

Third, in contrast with traditional rhetoric, feminist rhetoric is inconclusive and paradoxical. It is undoubtedly rhetoric; it is designed to change minds, promote action, and communicate ideas. But it is simultaneously “anti-rhetoric” in that it abandons the traditional rhetor/audience dichotomy, invites audiences to draw their own conclusions and pursue their own plans of action, and does not presuppose an independently expressible message to be conveyed. On the one hand, feminist rhetors write to convince audiences that women should have “dignity, respect, and the right to self-determination.”⁷⁰ On the other hand, feminist rhetors write not to persuade but to engage with their audiences as fellow-rhetors in shared discovery of a previously unrecognized truth. One could say there is a clear goal in mind—women’s liberation—but Campbell warns, “women’s liberation is baffling because it has no program, because there is no clear answer to the recurring question, ‘What do women want?’”⁷¹ Feminist

⁶⁸ It must be said that Campbell is not here contributing to the stereotype of the angry, irrational feminist. Rather she explains how, in a society shaped by patriarchal assumptions of propriety and female decorum, feminists often cannot express their convictions without being perceived as angry or irrational. Many feminist advocates especially in the sixties and seventies have used this jarring phenomenon to their rhetorical advantage. See Campbell, 75–78, 81–83.

⁶⁹ Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation,” 84.

⁷⁰ Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation,” 86.

⁷¹ Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation,” 86. With this in mind, we can understand the subtitle of Campbell’s essay. “The rhetoric of women’s liberation” is an oxymoron because this rhetoric is an anti-rhetoric, opposed by its very nature to the assumptions and conventions of traditional rhetoric. But also, as Campbell says,

communication is paradoxical, then, because women do not simply have a message they want to be heard, they want *to be listened to* in an ongoing way. That is the paradox: Women's liberation has as part of its goal the participation of women even in the process of deliberating about the goal of women's liberation. The rhetor's voice is thus never final, never the last word, never authoritative over against the voices of the audience. Feminist speech does not rely on the silence of the audience but seeks to use speech to bring out the voices of the silenced.

Thus, as Campbell notes, the style and substance are interconnected; the medium and the message of women's liberation are inseparable. But this is not because there is a clear substance or message for which rhetors select an appropriate style or medium. The event of communication itself is woven into the goal of feminist communication. Means and ends are so interrelated that they are finally indistinguishable. The open-ended, personal, challenging, dialogical sharing of experiences, feelings, and viewpoints that constitute feminist rhetoric are themselves the realities feminist rhetors seek to bring about.

V. Conclusion

Both Freire and Campbell are critical of direct, monological communication, but their criticisms do not stem from an abstract commitment to a set of moral prescriptions. Both argue against the use of authoritative communiqués, but they are not thereby insisting that those who work for liberation attenuate their convictions or fight with one hand tied behind their back. Rather, they reason that in the situations in which they are working for change, a more dialogical mode of communication is more conducive to the ends they are pursuing. This dialogical style builds coalitions and uncovers commonalities without ironically perpetuating the same

“oxymoron” is the best label for women's liberation since it convinces by giving up the goal of convincing. Feminist rhetoric paradoxically conveys a message by its very refusal to assert a message in the familiar way.

hierarchical, oppressive myths Freire and Campbell are seeking to dismantle. The approaches to communication they advocate are still controversial and political, even revolutionary, but centered on listening and inviting response. In one sense their approaches get a message across (i.e., the message that each person has a voice that matters), but in a deeper sense these approaches create space for transformation of people and relationships more so than they merely transmit ideas and information. Though Freire and Campbell have their differences, they both illustrate how ICC can be employed in specific contexts to guide practical communicative action for social change.

4. Integral Communication, Part II: Søren Kierkegaard

In the previous chapter, I introduced the concepts of “self-betraying communication” (SBC), in which the means one uses convey a message that is not conducive to the goal one hopes to achieve, and “integral communication” (IC), in which the means are well-suited to the ends. Integral communication criticism (ICC) is the approach in which authors reflect on the specifics of their rhetorical goals—considering their audiences, anticipating reactions, and attending to the particulars of their situation—and theorize from there about which means are best suited for these ends.¹

We often assume that, in the effort to overcome a false view, the most effective approach is direct, forceful opposition. Resisting a false viewpoint is like winning a game of tug-of-war; we need to yield no ground and pull the opponent toward our position. In order for our side to win in a struggle between truth and falsehood, we need more powerful arguments, more passionate rhetoric, and unwavering conviction if we want truth to win out.

In this dissertation, I argue that this direct, oppositional approach is not necessarily the best one, at least when it comes to expressing some truths. Resistance of this sort may be rendered inert, may ironically drive interlocutors deeper into their illusions, or may capture the rhetors in these same illusions. We saw in chapter 2 that efforts to end conflicts often ironically exacerbate those conflicts, and similarly the efforts to overcome illusions may often ironically confirm those illusions in the minds of the interlocutors. A different approach is needed to free all parties from these entrenched illusions and clear the path for the truth.

¹ To say this is somewhat misleading, as we will discuss in chapter 5. Sometimes it is the means which are evident, and the ends which are less clear. Properly speaking, ICC involves a thinking together about means and ends, considering relations beyond merely instrumental efficacy.

Perhaps no writer has thought more carefully about the problem of self-betraying communication than Søren Kierkegaard.² Kierkegaard's writings provide perhaps the clearest example of how direct opposition to one's interlocutors can be counter-productive. Even for those who do not share his communicative goal of re-introducing Christianity into Christendom, Kierkegaard's use of ICC is instructive.³

Living in the heavily Lutheran city of Copenhagen in the nineteenth century, Kierkegaard was surrounded by preachers expounding Christian teachings, philosophers demonstrating the truth of Christian precepts, and public rituals of Christian adherence. In Christendom, that is, a setting where it is assumed that almost everyone is Christian, explicitly Christian speech was in no short supply. But Kierkegaard maintained that the true message of Christianity was being distorted, or as he said, "abolished, if in no other way, then by the *wrong, unchristian* form that is given to the *Christian* communication."⁴

What is an unchristian form of communication? For Kierkegaard, an essential part of the Christian life is self-examination and imitation, finding oneself confronted by Christ and beckoned to follow. The grammar of Christianity, what Christianity *is*, is not a set of objective statements about God and the world but a transforming relationship with God and a repentant way of living in light of revealed truth. If one communicates Christianity in a way that makes it seem objective, that makes it seem like a system of ideas that one can evaluate disinterestedly and impersonally, then, according to Kierkegaard, that person has communicated something other than Christianity without realizing it. Hearing the gospel is closer to hearing an order, an

² See, among other examples, the parables in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 74–80.

³ *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* 2nd ed., trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1:388.

⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1998), 122.

accusation, or an invitation than it is to hearing a hypothesis. Thus the means of rationalistic apologetics, moralistic preaching, and idealistic theology lead to the ends of superficial conversion or superficial rejection, or of belief in something less than or other than Christianity, not to actual engagement with the demanding message of Christ. In Kierkegaard's terms, these forms of communication keep Christianity in the sphere of the speculative, without affecting the existential.

An analogy is instructive.⁵ Say a pastor tells his congregation that it is wrong to gossip. The parishioners all nod knowingly, but then go home and continue gossiping unabated, while nonetheless assenting to the proposition that it is wrong to gossip. Kierkegaard insists that this happens because people are under the illusion that they are not gossips, or that what they do is harmless. Kierkegaard says of instances like this that both the communication and the reception are purely external to the audience, matters of objective, abstract belief. The message gets stored in the repository of moral facts, to be dragged out only when deemed necessary. Even if the pastor tells his congregation that one should not merely believe gossip is wrong, but that they should apply this to their own lives, the congregation will still nod knowingly and agree that one should indeed apply this moral lesson to one's life, and then go home and continue gossiping all the same. By telling people who already think gossip is wrong that gossip is wrong, you offer them only the opportunity to reassure themselves that they are moral people because they hold proper moral beliefs. Moral exhortation, when the audience is under such an illusion, leads more to self-righteousness than to repentance and reform.

⁵ Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1997), 165; *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 467.

Kierkegaard's central task as a writer, as he understood it in his later years, was to diagnose how Christianity was misrepresented in his time and write in a way that could serve as a corrective to those tendencies.⁶ Motivated by the insight that "by a direct attack [the critic] only strengthens a person in the illusion,"⁷ he develops an approach to communication that is indirect—subverting, redirecting, and out-narrating his interlocutors' misguided viewpoints. His approach is informed not merely by strategic reasoning or moral reasoning, but also an assessment of the beliefs and assumptions of his interlocutors, attention to the dynamics of human assent, and a complex understanding of Christian faith. His writings form arguably the most detailed and innovative Christian theology of communication since Augustine.⁸ Indeed, his thoughts on how to communicate Christianity in a way that avoids self-betraying communication are instructive even for those with no interest in religion. For the rest of this chapter, we will analyze Kierkegaard's integral communication critique. My goals in this chapter are threefold: to illustrate ICC in greater depth by analyzing how a master theorist and practitioner utilizes it, to draw from Kierkegaard some helpful conceptual tools (concerned speech, illusions, the situation, correctives, etc.), and to provide practical suggestions which communicators can analogously

⁶ *The Point of View*, 23. In saying this, I am treating Kierkegaard's later statements of his own goals and methods as more or less reliable. The account that follows is consistent with the picture Kierkegaard gives of his own writings in the 1848–1849 works *On My Work as an Author* and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*. This is contested, and scholars are unsure whether to take these reflections on his own authorship as faithful representations of his earlier motives or as an all-too-tidy post hoc reinterpretation of a more complicated history. As Joakim Garff rightly notes, with *The Point of View* "Kierkegaard founded Kierkegaard research," and his self-interpretation is not infallible (See Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 562. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will focus on *The Point of View* and the *Journals and Papers* and the interpretation they give of the pseudonymous writings more so than the earlier writings themselves. As Paul Holmer reminds us, even if we disbelieve Kierkegaard that the pseudonymous writings are religious works communicated indirectly, the theory of indirect communication is still worthwhile. (Paul Holmer, *On Kierkegaard and the Truth*, [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012], 240). It is this theory—the later Kierkegaard's interpretation of his earlier writings—that concerns us in this section. To that end, I will refrain from discussing Kierkegaard's "Attack on Christendom" toward the end of his life, which was more direct (though Kierkegaard maintained it still had an element of indirectness). Even though Kierkegaard reiterates that the Christian gospel is "direct-indirect," for the sake of space I will focus primarily on the indirect task of communicating the gospel in Christendom.

⁷ *The Point of View*, 43.

⁸ See especially Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

extend to their own persuasive purposes. A fourth and subsidiary goal is to argue that Kierkegaard ought to be taken seriously as a rhetorical theorist; his contributions to this field are largely unheralded.⁹ These conceptual tools and practical suggestions will come into play again in chapters 5 and 6, where we focus specifically on advocacy and reconciliation in situations of social conflict.

I. Concerned Speech

Kierkegaard argues that context is extremely important when considering the merit of a piece of communication, and that rhetorical approaches that are appropriate in one time and place may be inappropriate in another. His term for this context is “the situation.”¹⁰ A situation can be as small as the relationship between a teacher and a student, or as large as Western culture.¹¹ The situation encompasses the audience’s beliefs and assumptions, including the perception the audience has of the speaker. Hence Kierkegaard writes, “Two men may say the same thing, perhaps word for word, but which one says it—this is not the same—no, this is the infinite distinction.”¹² For Kierkegaard “the situation is decisive;”¹³ it plays a constitutive role in the meaning of the communication.

There are certain communicative actions that can only be taken in specific situations. Just as one cannot *apologize* without addressing the wronged parties, so one cannot *protest* an unjust

⁹ Walter Jost wrote in 1994 that Kierkegaard is “simply missing from all of the standard accounts of rhetoric and its history.” Jost goes on to theorize why this is the case and works to correct this oversight. “On Concealment and Deception in Rhetoric: Newman and Kierkegaard” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 24, nos. 1/2 (Winter/Spring, 1994), 51. Since then, a notable exception to this trend is the work of John Durham Peters. Peters notes that “Kierkegaard is perhaps the first to make communication per se a philosophical problem,” and writes (insightfully, I think) that “in a broad sense, communication is the theme of all of his works.” *Speaking into the Air: The History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 128.

¹⁰ Kierkegaard’s treatment of “the situation” anticipates Lloyd Bitzer’s account of the “rhetorical situation.” See Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1, no. 1 (1968): 1–14.

¹¹ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 1:653; *Point of View*, 52–53.

¹² *Journals and Papers*, 1:678.

¹³ *Journals and Papers*, 4:4052

government when one is heard only by people who already support one's cause. Similarly, Kierkegaard writes, "From a Christian point of view, to *confess Christ* is to do it in the situation Christianity assigns: the actual world. To confess Christ is not to say it on a Sunday in a quiet hour, or in private conversation in the peaceful living room, etc."¹⁴

This notion of the situation is crucial for the ethics of communication. It's common in ethical discussions to treat the question of morality as distinct from the question of anticipated effectiveness. For example, whether torture usually works and whether torture is permissible are distinct questions. Some actions are morally praiseworthy even if one does not believe they are likely to bring about actual results. Of any action, the moral question is roughly, "What sort of act is it?" while the instrumental question is, "How effective is it at achieving its goal?" These are related questions, of course, and serious ethical reflection involves attention to both the nature of the act and the expected consequences.¹⁵ But in communication, the relationship between the character of a symbolic action and its anticipated effectiveness is much stickier.

Imagine there is a room filled with hungry lions, and entering this room leads to certain death. Blissfully unaware of this, you walk toward the door to this room to open it. Even though I speak English and have no reason to believe you speak Swahili, I say in Swahili, "Don't go in there; it's full of lions and they will kill you." You walk through the door and are promptly eaten. Can we reasonably say that I "warned" you? The grammar of the word "warn" dictates that the speaker should expect that the audience can receive the message *as a warning*. We might say the same thing of the concept "advise." In order for an action to count as advising, the advisor has to reasonably expect that their message will be received as an effort at giving advice. The person

¹⁴ *Journals and Papers*, 4:4056. Italics mine.

¹⁵ If torture were never an effective way of gaining information, for example, it would be easy to rule out any ethical arguments in favor of torture.

receiving the advice does not need to act on that advice, but they need to recognize it as such. Or consider the following scenario. I own a farm and I say to one of my lazy farmhands, “If you don’t work harder, I’m going to get Old Henry.” Old Henry is the name I’ve given my rifle, but the farmhand doesn’t know that, and I don’t have any reason to think the farmhand knows that. Would we say that I have “threatened” my farmhand?

To introduce a distinction, we can say that verbs like “warn,” “advise,” and “threaten” are neither fully independent verbs nor fully dependent verbs.¹⁶ Fully independent verbs can be applied to speech-acts regardless of the anticipated reception of an audience. I can yell, for example, even if no one is around to hear me yelling, and the same goes for whispering, babbling, and saying “cornucopia.” I can recite a poem even if my listeners do not recognize it as a poem and I have no expectation they will. The same goes for making an allusion, uttering a profanity, and restating a point.

Fully dependent verbs can only be applied to speech-acts in which the speaker is successful. Take “convince,” for example. If I make my case and you aren’t persuaded, then I haven’t convinced you, I’ve only *tried* to convince you. The same goes for intimidate, impress, enlighten, shock, and seduce. In order for the statement “I impressed you with my vocabulary when I said ‘cornucopia’” to be true, it has to be the case that you were impressed; the applicability of the verb depends on the audience’s reaction.

Between these two sets are a third set of verbs—like “warn,” “advise,” and “threaten”—that are neither fully independent of nor fully dependent upon how they are received. We can say that these actions have occurred only if the speaker can reasonably expect that in a particular situation the audience can receive the message in a certain way. The action does not need to be

¹⁶ This distinction is similar to Gilbert Ryle’s distinction between “task verbs” and “achievement verbs,” *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Harper and Row, 1949), 149–53.

successful; I can, for example, apologize even if my listener does not accept my apology. But if my listener cannot be expected to recognize my apology as an apology and receive it as such, then in a sense I have not actually apologized.

The actions named by this third group of verbs exemplify what I will call *concerned speech*. To describe an action using one of these verbs is to situate it within a context of reasonably anticipated reception by an audience. This is why the neat distinction between morality and effectiveness becomes especially difficult to maintain when considering communication. Let's return to the room-full-of-lions example to illustrate why. If I had said in English, reasonably expecting that you spoke English, "Don't go in there!" but you do anyway, then I have indeed warned you but my warning was not effective. We can easily distinguish my action from its result and say that I was morally right to warn you even if my warning did not have the consequences I desired. But if I speak English and know that you speak English but still make my utterance in Swahili and you proceed, it's not the case that I warned you *ineffectively*, but rather I *did not warn you at all*.¹⁷ Let's assume that one has a moral obligation to warn others of imminent danger if one can. If I did not have reason to believe that certain consequences will obtain (viz., you understanding my statement as a warning), then my action cannot be described as "warning," and I did not fulfill my moral obligation. The question of whether I can expect to get my point across (rhetorical effectiveness) and whether I am acting to save another person's life (moral obligation) are intrinsically related.

¹⁷ Or at least, the question of whether or not I warned you is up for debate. My point is less about the grammar of specific verbs and more about the concerned nature of symbolic activity. My discussion here draws heavily from Mikhail Bakhtin, specifically his discussions of "addressivity." Bakhtin was deeply indebted to Kierkegaard, and there is considerable overlap in their thoughts on communication. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

Consider one final example. There is a saying within the organization Teach for America, “If nobody’s learning, then nobody’s teaching.” The idea is that if a teacher is not paying attention to how students are receiving lessons, and adjusting their teaching style to facilitate learning, then in a real sense they are not fulfilling their duty as a teacher. This is not simply a grammatical remark about the way we use the word “teach,” it is an effort to express a pedagogical principle. Teaching is concerned speech.¹⁸

The term “concerned speech” is derived from Kierkegaard’s concept of “concerned truths.” He contrasts concerned truths with indifferent truths, and writes,

Such a truth is not indifferent to how the individual received it, whether he wholeheartedly appropriates it or it becomes mere words to him. This very difference certainly shows that it is jealous of itself, is not indifferent to whether the truth becomes a blessing or a ruination to him... is not indifferent to whether he honestly places his confidence in it or whether, himself deceived, he wants to deceive others... Such a concerned truth is not independent of the one who has propounded it; on the contrary, he remains present in it continually in order in turn to concern himself about the single individual.¹⁹

Elsewhere Kierkegaard talks about this in terms of “the dialectical,” referring to how concerned speech is especially attentive to what comes before (the situation) and what comes after (the message’s reception). In his notes for his “Two Lectures on Communication,” he writes, “The dialectical in that the communicator must have eyes in the back of his head with regard to the actual appropriation of the communication.”²⁰

¹⁸ A stubbornly inattentive student in a class could effectively resist excellent teaching, so teaching is not fully dependent. A professor who simply reads aloud from a textbook might think she’s teaching but not really be teaching, so teaching is not fully independent. The classification of any of these words is debatable.

¹⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 233–234. Cf. *Journals and Papers*, 4:4862. For more on concerned truths, see Paul Holmer, *On Kierkegaard and the Truth*, 141; Christopher Ben Simpson, *The Truth is the Way: Kierkegaard’s Theologia Viatorum* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 14–5; Keith Lane, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Religious Authorship* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

²⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers* 1:649. Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Johannes Climacus writes of indirect communication that it “would always be required to think of the receiver and pay attention to the form of communication in relation to the receiver’s misunderstanding.” *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 76. For the rest of this chapter, I will cite passages from the *Postscript* and other pseudonymous works that seem to express

With these categories, we can return to an example of ICC discussed in Chapter 3, Desmond Tutu exhorting his fellow black protesters not to use violence to bring about social change. In the situation of apartheid South Africa, the message conveyed by these violent actions—even if intended as an expression of anti-apartheid justice—would likely be received by many audiences as a confirmation of the racial stereotypes that justify apartheid.²¹ For Tutu, asserting the dignity of black South Africans is concerned speech. Hence Tutu was not focused solely on moral obligation, nor solely on strategic effectiveness, but on making sure the message of black Africans’ equality could be heard, received, and appropriated.

In Tutu’s situation, as in Kierkegaard’s, an illusion stands in the way of direct communication. For Tutu, the illusion is racism and all the myths, half-truths, anxieties, and biases that comprise it. Since, as we will discuss in the following chapter, Tutu’s message is concerned speech, he needs to take these illusions into account in his advocacy. For Kierkegaard, the principal illusions he contends with are those of Christendom.²²

II. The Illusions of Christendom

In the communication of Christianity, when the situation is Christendom, there is not a direct relation, there is first of all a delusion to remove. The entire old science of arms, all the apologetics and everything belonging to it, serves instead, to put it bluntly, to betray the cause of Christianity. At every point and at every

Kierkegaard’s own thought, drawing attention to each pseudonym’s distinctives only when relevant. To do so is to go against Kierkegaard’s own wishes, but my interest in this chapter is to get clear on the notion on indirect communication more so than to do justice to the complexity of Kierkegaard’s authorship. For a comparison of Climacus’s perspective to the signed works and journal entries, see C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983).

²¹ For Tutu, to cease protesting in that specific situation (after the killing of Steve Biko) would also be self-betraying communication. To be silent would express a message of complacency with the existing violent order that is at odds with the goal of a free South Africa. Hence Tutu’s famous statement, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality” is also an example of ICC.

²² Kierkegaard treats Christendom as a single illusion, but for the purposes of explicating his meaning, I treat it as a cluster of related illusions.

moment, the strategy must be constituted on the basis of having to contend with a delusion, an illusion.²³

To understand what Kierkegaard is saying in this passage, we need to attend to his description of the illusions of Christendom. Christendom is established Christianity, a social situation in which it is assumed that almost everyone is Christian. In Kierkegaard's time, to be Danish is to be Lutheran, so "thousands and thousands, as a matter of course, call themselves Christian."²⁴ The majority in Christendom consider themselves Christian, "But there is no ear for what Christianity requires regarding self-denial, renunciation, and seeking first the Kingdom of God."²⁵ According to Kierkegaard, these people are not lying so much as they are self-deceived; they have lost sight of what Christianity truly means and hold on to it as a hollow identity marker. In the so-called Christian nation of Denmark, "Christianity" becomes a matter of church membership, doctrinal confessions, and culturally-sanctioned rituals. What is truly essential to Christianity, the existential relating of one's whole self to God, is absent. This absence is obscured by sermons that reinforce the idea that Christianity makes no demands on one's life beyond the demands of good Danish citizenship. Hence when he talks about Christendom, Kierkegaard means "the illusion that in such a country all are Christians,"²⁶ a universality obtained at the cost of "Christianity" meaning nothing at all.

²³ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 52f. Cf. "A new science must be introduced: The Christian art of speaking, to be constructed *admodum* Aristotle's *Rhetoric*." *Journals and Papers* 1:627. Though Kierkegaard does not use the phrase "self-betraying communication," he makes several references to "betrayal" in communication. See *Point of View*, 80, 280; *Christian Discourses*, 162, 190; *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1991), 144; *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1980), 87; *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 49.

²⁴ *The Point of View*, 41. The idea of "Christendom" often has a political dimension, and this is true for Kierkegaard as well, but I will not discuss it here.

²⁵ *Journals and Papers*, 1:383; cf. 1:397, "It is the other and really decisive side of Christianity which has been abolished in Christendom. Christianity has become a doctrine; but conversion, rebirth, imitation, dying away from this world, renunciation, self-denial, etc.—they are as if blown away."

²⁶ *The Point of View*, 23.

On Kierkegaard's analysis, Danish culture includes at least three illusions that hinder people from recognizing authentic Christianity. As we will discuss in greater detail later, Kierkegaard maintains that Christian communication is self-betraying to the extent that it feeds into these illusions rather than subverting them. First, there is the illusion that what it means to be a Christian can be deduced from the behavior of other self-identified Christians. Consider this: the way I determine whether or not I am tall is by looking around at the people in my society and estimating the average height, then comparing myself to that average. Similarly, if I were asked whether or not I am a "nice" person, my thought process would go as follows: people in general are pretty nice, though some are exceptionally compassionate and some are mean. I am somewhere in the middle, and if asked people would probably say I am nice. Nice is the default position, and since I am not *not* nice, I conclude that I am nice—or at least, I say with a shrug, nice enough. In practice, what it means to be tall or nice is determined by comparison with others in one's society. In Christendom, the word "Christian" is treated this way, and Kierkegaard insists that actual Christianity is abolished in the process.

For Kierkegaard, Christianity is a matter of the single individual's unique relation to Christ. One determines whether one is a Christian not by comparing oneself to others, but by comparing oneself to Christ.²⁷ Not by one's membership in good standing of a church, but by one's utter reliance upon God's grace. If the standard for what it means to be Christian is other people or church membership, for Kierkegaard this is not just a grammatical misunderstanding but a total abandonment of Christianity. If you ask someone whether they are Christian, and they say yes based on their church attendance, baptism, similarity to other Christians, and difference from non-Christians, then they have not simply overestimated their piety but have misunderstood

²⁷ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, 200.

the question. If they really understood the question, they would look to Christ, recognize their own sins and failings, and trust that God will forgive them, sustain them, and command them to love.

Kierkegaard's goal is not to make people more passionately Christian or present a more demanding version of Christian life. To make Christianity quantitatively more demanding only contributes to the illusion; the goal is not to make the standard higher but to make the standard *Christ*. This is categorically different. Kierkegaard wants to make people recognize that they have misconstrued the gospel and turned Christianity into something it is not. He makes this point throughout his writings using the language of "the crowd" and "the single individual." His aim is not to disparage communities or promote individualism, as is sometimes thought, but "with expert one-sidedness"²⁸ to challenge this illusion and present the question of Christianity correctly.

A second illusion prevalent in Christendom is the assumption that Christianity is principally a matter of believing doctrines. Kierkegaard writes that in Christendom,

Christianity is regarded as a sum of doctrines; lectures are given on it in the same way as on ancient philosophy, Hebrew, or any branch of knowledge whatever, with the listener or the learner's relation to it left as a matter of indifference. Basically this is paganism. The essentially Christian is precisely this: the relation to Christianity is what is decisive. Someone can know all about Christianity, can know how to explain, discuss, expound—but if in addition he thinks that his own personal relation to Christianity is a matter of indifference, then he is a pagan. But, just as all regimes have been overthrown, so also has Christianity been overthrown. Rather than it should rule over people, transform their lives, not only on Sunday but every day, intervene decisively in all relationships of life, it is kept at a scholarly distance as mere doctrine, the agreement between its various doctrines is shown—but your life and my life, the agreement or nonagreement in the lives of people with this doctrine—that is a matter of indifference.²⁹

²⁸ *The Point of View*, 205.

²⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 214–15. Cf. *For Self-Examination*, 39, 127–42; *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 326–31, 379–80, 570; *Point of View*, 129–30; *Journals and Papers*, 1:401.

The problem, according to Kierkegaard, is not that people have stopped believing in Christianity, nor merely been insufficiently pious, but that they have come to treat Christianity as a set of ideas that could be evaluated at arm's length. On this reckoning, a person is a Christian so long as they intellectually assent to the objective truth of Christian doctrines. Even if Kierkegaard's contemporaries might not explicitly agree with this assessment, Kierkegaard recognizes his assumption is embedded in how words like "faith" and "belief" are typically used.³⁰

Kierkegaard contrasts doctrines with what he calls "existence." Intellectual assent to a set of propositions is not sufficient for faith; one needs to understand Christian truths in relation to oneself. It is not enough to believe them, one must understand one's life in light of them and act accordingly. Paul Holmer summarizes Kierkegaard's point well, "All the doctrines of Christian history together do not add up to the knowledge of God, any more than does general psychology add up to self-knowledge."³¹

Kierkegaard believes that his culture is under the illusion that theological belief is prior to and more important than existential commitment. "In Kierkegaard's view," Stephen Toulmin and Allan Janik write, "the greatest disaster that ever befell Christianity was the attempt to express its truths in speculative terms. As a result, Christianity contradicted itself. Speculative truth is a matter of universal and complete knowledge, *true for all time*; whereas Christianity has to do with the existing person, who is always in a state of becoming, always an individual. Speculation is concerned with 'objective truth,' Christianity is rooted in *subjective truth*, a notion which lies

³⁰ "I understand it as my task to extricate the Christian concepts from the illusions in which we have entangled them, and in so doing work toward an awakening." *Journals and Papers*, 6:554; cf. 1:390. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1995), 119, "It is easy to bring about an apparent agreement between God's view of love and the world's; it is already apparent in this common expression that love is noble. Yet the misunderstanding remains concealed. What is the point of praising love as noble, when the world understands something else by love and then in turn understands something else by nobility?"

³¹ Paul L. Holmer, *Communicating the Faith Indirectly* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 36.

close to the heart of all Kierkegaard's thinking."³² Kierkegaard's point is difficult to pin down for a variety of reasons, but in short he argues that Christianity is not a position which one first acknowledges the truth of and then, in a separate act, relates to one's own life. Consider the difference between someone saying to you, "I love all people" and someone saying to you, "I love you." Logically speaking, the second one is entailed by the first. But the second is costlier, more profound, and more personal. It has a dimension of meaning—which Kierkegaard calls the *pro me* [for me]—that the first lacks.³³ When Kierkegaard writes that "Christianity is not a doctrine,"³⁴ his point is that you do not understand the Christian gospel unless you understand it as addressed to you, as involving you.

We can make a distinction between thinking Christianity is true in a *generic* way (that God created all people, all have sinned, Christ died for all people, etc.) and thinking Christianity is true in an *individuated* way (that God created me, that I have sinned, that Christ died for me, etc.). It is common for theologians, philosophers, and apologists to deal primarily with Christianity as a set of generic truths—doctrines—and to be indifferent about how people individuate these truths or to assume that people will individuate these truths privately as a matter of course. Kierkegaard, by contrast, maintained that the gospel is always individuated, and to treat it as something generic, even for a moment, is to be under an illusion. This illusion is especially pernicious because the notion that one should not simply assent to something, but should apply it to one's life, *is itself a notion that can be treated as something objective*, as a principle to be assented to without applying it to one's life.

³² Stephen Toulmin and Allan Janik, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 160.

³³ The *pro me* is a central theme in *Christian Discourses* and *For Self-Examination*. On the *pro me* in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, see Antony Aumann, "Kierkegaard and the Need for Indirect Communication" (PhD diss, Indiana University, 2008), 153–54.

³⁴ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 379, 570. Cf. *For Self-Examination* 127–131; *Point of View*, 129; *Christian Discourses*, 214–215.

As we saw in chapter 2, a person can intellectually assent to a proposition without that proposition becoming “activated” in their lives. When this happens, people become self-deceived. They think they hold to principles and will agree with those principles when they hear them propounded, all the while the principles are not governing their actions. The second illusion of Christendom is such a self-deception; what Albert Bandura calls “activating” is close to what Kierkegaard means by “existing.” Hence when Kierkegaard says people are under an illusion, he does not mean that they intellectually assent to false beliefs, but that the way they live their lives is in some sense false—either because it does not correspond to reality (in Kierkegaard’s case, the reality of Christianity) or because it does not correspond to their own expressed commitments.

A third illusion of Christendom in nineteenth-century Denmark is the one-dimensional emphasis on grace. Lutheranism emphasizes salvation by grace through faith independent of one’s works. This notion was revolutionary in Luther’s Germany, but had become mundane in Kierkegaard’s Denmark. As Kierkegaard writes,

Now there will again be an uproar claiming that I proclaim only the law, urge imitation [of Christ] too strongly, and the like... And they will say: We cannot stop with this; we must go further—to grace, where there is peace and rest. You babble nonsense. For the average person, Christianity has shriveled to sheer meaninglessness, a burlesque edition of the doctrine of grace, that if one is Christian one lets things go their way and counts on God’s grace. But because everything that is essentially Christian has shriveled to meaninglessness this way, they are unable to recognize it again when pathos-filled aspects are delineated. They have the whole thing in an infinitely empty, abstract summary—and thus think they have gone further than the successive unfolding of the pathos-filled aspects. Nothing can be taken in vain as easily as grace; as soon as imitation is completely omitted, grace is taken in vain. But that is the kind of preaching people like.³⁵

³⁵ *The Point of View*, 248. Cf. 16; *Journals and Papers*, 1:389, 1:401, 1:763; *For Self-Examination*, 150–213.

As this passage suggests, for Kierkegaard the significance of an idea or event sometimes depends upon its placement within a sequence. Significance is inherently dramatic; unless one takes the time to dwell in what comes before, one will not be able to fully appreciate what comes after.³⁶ This is the case whether one is solving puzzles, reading novels, or watching sporting events—all of these are in some sense building toward a conclusion, but if one rushes impatiently to the conclusion one will not be able to appreciate its significance. Only when we reckon with the demand—to imitate Christ—and with our own inability to live up to this demand—sin—can we recognize the gift of grace for what it truly is. Outside of this context of absolute demand and absolute failure, the idea of salvation by grace becomes something else, a “burlesque.”

Kierkegaard’s soteriology is complicated, but an oversimplified summary might shed light on his diagnosis of this illusion. For Kierkegaard, roughly, there are four “stages” or “spheres”³⁷ of the Christian drama: (1) the demand, what God expects of every person, (2) the fall, the person cannot live up to the demand, (3) the gift, God offers grace and forgiveness to sinners, and (4) “existence-communication,”³⁸ the person lives into God’s declaration of who they are, and witnesses through their words and actions to the good news. While there is an order to these four, to call them “stages” might be misleading, because one does not move beyond the lower stages as one moves into the higher. The Christian is, in Luther’s phrase, *simul justus et peccator*, simultaneously redeemed and a sinner. Likewise, someone who is in the fourth stage always remains in the other three—always called upon to be perfect, always in the wrong, always dependent upon the grace of God.

³⁶ Here again, Bakhtin’s work on meaning echoes and expands upon Kierkegaard’s insights. See *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* and *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

³⁷ On Kierkegaard’s use of “stages” and “spheres,” see Mark Tietjen, *Kierkegaard, Communication, and Virtue: Authorship as Edification* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 34. These are different from the esthetic, the ethical, and the religious “stages” Kierkegaard addresses throughout his work.

³⁸ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 380, 560, 570, 608.

As Kierkegaard sees it, the massive illusion of Christendom is that Christians have already passed through stages 1–3, and having completed these stages, nothing more is needed. Salvation is seen as something accomplished, as a “result,” a *fait accompli*. Being a Christian is like being an Eagle Scout, a PhD, or an Olympic medalist—it means one has done something in the past (or had something done for one in the past), and it carries no real demands save a few cultural expectations for how one is to act in the present. People under this illusion still use the language of law, sin, and grace, but these concepts are “meaningless” because they are matters of the past, stages one has moved beyond. Under this illusion, a person is a Christian by virtue of something in their past, and all that is required of them now is an occasional expression of gratitude to God and to remember God’s pardon whenever they feel guilty.

In Kierkegaard’s theology, however, the drama of the Christian life is never completed. It is always dynamic and unfolding. Kierkegaard emphasized the need to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”³⁹ The fourth stage—existence-communication—is the way of life Christians are called to, and it is characterized by *becoming* and *witnessing*.⁴⁰ We will discuss this in greater depth later, but the important point is that it is very difficult for someone to communicate the necessity of this fourth stage to those under the illusion. As the passage quoted above says, “They have the whole thing in an infinitely empty, abstract summary—and thus think they have gone further than the successive unfolding of the pathos-filled aspects.” If one proclaims existence-communication and one’s message sounds like the demand or the fall, then people will promptly fill in the ending of the story by moving along to the gift. In response to a

³⁹ Philippians 2:12 (KJV).

⁴⁰ A key element of becoming Christian for Kierkegaard is self-denial. He writes, “If Christianity is to be reintroduced into Christendom, it must again be proclaimed unconditionally as imitation, as law, so Christianity does not become the conjunctive (which sanctifies all our cherished relationships and our earthly fortune and striving) but the disjunctive: to let go of everything, to hate one’s father and mother and oneself.” *Journals and Papers*, 1:401. I will return to the topic of self-denial later in the chapter.

spur to Christian action, they will emphasize grace in a way that neutralizes the challenge.⁴¹ This is an example of what Kierkegaard calls “sagacity,”⁴² the sense (often mistaken) that one already knows the ending and so does not need to learn anything new or do anything more. A sagacious audience is difficult to communicate to, since, as Kierkegaard writes, “To presume to communicate the truth directly to one who is untruth, who believes falsehood, will likely be met with resistance, rejection, dismissal—for, from the perspective of the other, one is presuming to give them something they already have, something they do not lack, namely the truth.”⁴³

To summarize, for Kierkegaard the Christian gospel is *concerned truth* and confessing Christ is *concerned speech*. The Christian gospel demands to be communicated in ways that take into consideration how audiences will likely receive it. To do otherwise is not simply to communicate the gospel poorly, but to “betray” the gospel by misleading one’s audience about what it is to be a Christian. When one’s audience is under the illusions of Christendom, there are many ways to preach Christianity that are self-betraying, because in the process Christianity is subtly transformed into something other than what it truly is.

In this section, I have surveyed three interrelated illusions Kierkegaard diagnosed in his situation. First, the illusion that people are Christian as a matter of course, and that you learn what it means to be Christian by comparing yourself with the crowd.⁴⁴ Second, the illusion that Christianity is a set of doctrines to assent to, a set of objective truths one can believe without self-examination and transformation. Third, the illusion that the essentially Christian is something Christians already know, perhaps have known since childhood, and that to be a

⁴¹ We can call this “playing the grace card.”

⁴² *The Point of View*, 163.

⁴³ Simpson, *The Truth Is the Way*, 12.

⁴⁴ Evans, *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript*, 52.

Christian is to have undergone something in the past that has only a minimal bearing on one's present existence.

The difficulty of disabusing someone of an illusion is that the illusion makes it difficult for them to realize they are under an illusion. For those under an illusion, the illusion also colors any attempts at removing it. To “introduce *Christianity—into Christendom*,”⁴⁵ necessarily involve precision lest Kierkegaard betray his goals by confirming these illusions in the minds of his audience.⁴⁶ If, for example, he makes his version of Christianity sound like yet another idea one can assent to without self-examination, then to some degree he has not effectively challenged the illusion or faithfully represented Christianity.⁴⁷ To navigate through this rhetorical mine field, Kierkegaard developed a theory of indirect communication, to which we will now turn.

III. Indirect Communication

Kierkegaard writes, “The situation (becoming a Christian in Christendom, where consequently one is a Christian)... makes an indirect method necessary, because the end task here must be to take measures against the illusion: calling oneself a Christian, perhaps deluding oneself into thinking one is that without being that... In relation to pure receptivity, like the empty jar that is to be filled, direct communication is appropriate, but when the illusion is

⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 1:388.

⁴⁶ “My task is to work against a given wrong propagation (therefore not a task of propagating something) along the line of what could be called smoke-abatement, but in that case it is important to keep watch with great circumspection... lest the smoke-abatement in turn become a false propagation.” *The Point of View*, 125.

⁴⁷ Kierkegaard sees his task as necessarily both positive and negative. Cf. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 85, 275; *The Point of View*, 88, 235; *Journals and Papers* 1:760. Evans writes, “The existential communicator must see his task as both positive and negative. He reflects not merely on what he must communicate but to whom he is communicating. If the recipient is in the grip of various illusions, this obviously makes his task much more difficult. Existential illusions cannot be directly dispelled any more than the truth can be directly communicated, since a person may will, consciously or unconsciously, to remain in the illusion. But the communicator can be the occasion for the removal of an illusion.” *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 105.

involved, consequently something that must first be removed, direct communication is inappropriate.”⁴⁸ But what does he mean by “direct communication” and why is it inappropriate for this task? What is the alternative?

In this section, we will analyze how Kierkegaard answers these questions using ICC. To reiterate, Kierkegaard is not using prescriptive proceduralist norms to restrain his writing, nor is he just using salesmanship tactics to improve his chances at persuasion. Rather, his theory of indirect communication is based upon the integral connection between means and ends.⁴⁹

Kierkegaard’s theorizing about communication hinges on this integral connection.⁵⁰ For the end of providing an occasion for individuals to become Christian in the situation of Christendom, certain communicative means are preferable to others because those others convey a message at odds with the appropriation of Christian truth. For Kierkegaard, integral communication of Christianity in the context of Danish Christendom involves at least these four components:

III.A. Not Antagonizing, but Ministering

⁴⁸ *The Point of View*, 8. For a helpful review of the different scholarly interpretations of Kierkegaard’s writings on indirect communication, see Aumann, “Kierkegaard and the Need for Indirect Communication.”

⁴⁹ Lars Bejerholm is thus only half-right when he says, “According to himself Kierkegaard did not propose the use of ‘indirect’ method in order to make religious communication more effective but rather because he was religiously convinced that this method was the ‘right’ one, the one expressing fundamental Christian principles such as the one of equality of all men among whom no single human individual should be regarded as the master of others.” *Meddelelsens Dialektik* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962), 311. Kierkegaard believed that communicating Christianity indirectly would be more effective because it would express Christianity in a way that audiences under the illusions of Christendom would be less likely to misinterpret.

⁵⁰ George Pattison notes, “For Kierkegaard there is an intrinsic connection between ends and means,” and “Kierkegaard insisted that the means used must coincide with the end in order to be achieved.” *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 88, 5. Kierkegaard writes, “What means do you use to perform your work; is the means just as important to you as the end, just exactly as important? If not, you cannot possibly will one thing; in that case the indefensible, the irresponsible, the self-serving, the heterogeneous means enters in, disturbing and defiling. Eternally understood, the means is one thing, the end is one thing, the means and the end are one and the same. There is only one end: the good in truth, and only one means: to will to use only the means that in truth is the good means—but the good in truth is indeed the end.... When [a person] wills to use or uses only the means that truly is the good means, he is, eternally understood, at the end.” *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1993), 141. Cf. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 74–80, 153, 247; *Journals and Papers* 1:678. While I focus on the similarities, there are differences between Kierkegaard’s view of the means-ends relationship and Gandhi’s and King’s that I do not discuss in this dissertation.

Though Kierkegaard does not offer a definition of “direct communication,” the term seems to include straightforward statements of one’s views, arguments in favor of one’s position, declamations and proclamations, polemic and didactic communication, and explicit attempts to convince others. Kierkegaard believed that when one’s audience is under an illusion, a direct attack on the illusion will not be effective. “No,” he writes, “an illusion can never be removed directly, and basically only indirectly.”⁵¹ He continues,

Every once in a while a religious enthusiast appears. He makes an assault on Christendom; he makes a big noise, denounces nearly all as not being Christians—and he accomplishes nothing. He does not take into account that an illusion is not so easy to remove. If it is the case that most people are under an illusion when they call themselves Christians, what do they do about an enthusiast like that? First and foremost, they pay no attention to him at all, do not read his book but promptly lay it *ad acta* [aside]; or if he makes use of the Living Word, they go around on another street and do not listen to him at all. Then by means of a definition they smuggle him outside and settle down quite securely in their illusion. They make him out to be a fanatic and his Christianity to be an exaggeration—in the end he becomes the only one, or one of the few, who is not a Christian in earnest (since exaggeration, after all, is a lack of earnestness); the others are all earnest Christians.⁵²

People under an illusion have psychological counter-measures at the ready that might activate when they sense their views or lifestyles are under attack.

First, people will tend to disregard someone whose viewpoint is utterly at odds with their own. To the extent that one sees oneself as reasonable and informed, one will be likely to dismiss positions at odds with one’s own as unreasonable or uninformed unless the one asserting the

⁵¹ *The Point of View*, 43.

⁵² *The Point of View*, 42–43; cf. 132–133. Cf. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 566–569. “To thunder is no longer of any avail; it merely embitters men.” *Journals and Papers*, 1:639.

position is especially credible.⁵³ Since people in Christendom think they already know what it means to be a Christian, anyone who says otherwise will likely be dismissed as unreasonable.⁵⁴

Second, since people in Christendom rely on “the crowd” to determine what it means to be a Christian, anyone who preaches a different version of Christianity will likely be framed as an outsider. The direct critic’s criticisms are seen as external (to use a term from chapter 2) and the critic gets categorized in a way that renders their claims not binding on the majority. This is what Kierkegaard means by “by means of a definition they smuggle him outside.” This dismissal-by-categorization can take several forms. The critic can be lumped into a negative category—a fanatic, an extremist, a bigot—and summarily disregarded.⁵⁵ Alternately, the critic can be treated as a product of another community, whose criticisms are treated as informative about the attitudes of that community more so than truth-claims about one’s own community.⁵⁶ Or the critic can be dismissed by being placed on a pedestal; those around them can treat them as exceptional and their morals something to be respected but not necessarily emulated.⁵⁷

These defensive measures, among others, prevent direct attacks from achieving as much as critics hope for.⁵⁸ Kierkegaard writes, “If [a critic] becomes impatient then he makes a direct attack and accomplishes—nothing. By a direct attack he only strengthens a person in the illusion

⁵³ For example, if I believe that climate change is real, I will not initially take as credible any online article that claims otherwise, unless it is from a science journal I recognize or written by climate scientist at a university I have heard of.

⁵⁴ Ziva Kunda, “The Case for Motivated Reasoning”; Charles S. Taber and Milton Lodge, “Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 3 (July, 2006): 755–69.

⁵⁵ Kierkegaard recorded that in Copenhagen “I am regarded as a kind of Englishman, a half-mad eccentric.” *Journals and Papers*, 6:6254.

⁵⁶ For example, if a French person objects that Americans are too sensitive, my first reaction is not to examine by own country’s culture but to conclude that French culture must be very brusque.

⁵⁷ As Kierkegaard notes, this is often how we treat exemplars from the past. *Journals and Papers*, 4:4968, 4:4973.

⁵⁸ Brian L. Quick, Lijiang Shen, and James Price Dillard, “Reactance Theory and Persuasion,” *The SAGE Handbook of Persuasion*, eds. James Price Dillard and Lijiang Shen (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013), 167–83. Pioneering works on this topic include Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis, and Harold H. Kelley, *Communication and Persuasion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953); Arthur R. Cohen, “A Dissonance Analysis of the Boomerang Effect,” *Journal of Personality* 30, no. 1 (March, 1962), 75–88; and Jack Brehm’s *A Theory of Psychological Reactance* (New York: Academic Press, 1966).

and also infuriates him. Generally speaking, there is nothing that requires as gentle a treatment as the removal of an illusion. If one in any way causes the one ensnared to be antagonized, then all is lost.”⁵⁹ It is generally true that people are less likely to be persuaded if they become defensive, but as we have seen illusions contribute to this effect by providing justifications for disregarding criticisms or inventing rejoinders. Kierkegaard notes, “It is not that Christianity is not proclaimed, but it is Christendom that has become sheer expertise in transforming it into illusion and thus evading it.”⁶⁰ The direct attack may seem to the critic the most forceful challenge, but it is precisely the sort of challenge those under the illusion are most adept at neutralizing.

Antagonizing rhetoric prompts the audience to frame the issue in an “us versus them” way. In response, those who feel attacked will turn to one another for confirmation that they are in the right. Polemics, Kierkegaard notes, drive people further into the logic of the crowd.⁶¹ If you say to a pastor in Christendom that he is a bad preacher, he will likely compare himself to other preachers in the process of defending himself, driving him deeper into the illusion. Even if a critic is successful and gains a few converts, they are liable to compare themselves favorably with those who have not accepted the message. This, too, is the same illusion in a different guise: rather than comparing oneself to Christ, one compares oneself to others.⁶² In a similar way, when

⁵⁹ *The Point of View*, 43. Evans writes, “It is no good to thunder at people and affirm that they are not true Christians (thereby affirming that you are). Such a tactic only arms them by making them defensive. The correct tactic is to begin by accepting their illusion as ‘good money’ and subjecting it to examination. One must take people’s word if they say they are Christians, and then, by humbly confessing that you personally are not a Christian, since it is so difficult, lead them to the perception of the truth.” *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript*, 52. Cf. Kellenberger, “Kierkegaard, Indirect Communication, and Religious Truth,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16, no. 2 (1984), 158.

⁶⁰ *The Point of View*, 163. Cf. “The world has become all too sagacious. The person who intends to work for the religious must work undercover—otherwise he is not of much use. If someone passes himself off as religious, the world has a thousand evasions and illusions with which they protect themselves against him and get rid of him.” *The Point of View*, 163.

⁶¹ *The Point of View*, 18–20. Cf. *Works of Love*, 67–68. Christopher Ben Simpson writes, “Communication, especially communication of that which is most important and so most intimate, is inhibited by the frame of winning and losing.” *The Truth Is the Way*, 12–13.

⁶² *The Point of View*, 147. Cf. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 74–75, 608.

a person feels judged, they will often reach for a way to excuse themselves—in Lutheran Denmark, this means turning to the “burlesque edition of the doctrine of grace.” If you say to a pastor that his preaching betrays the gospel, he will likely respond, “Yes, it’s true, we are all fallen creatures, but thanks be to God my salvation does not depend on the quality of my preaching.” The evasions derive from and reinforce the illusions.

Kierkegaard advocates a different approach. He writes,

If one is truly to succeed in leading a person to a specific place, one must first and foremost take care to find him where he is and begin there.

This is the secret in the entire art of helping. Anyone who cannot do this is himself under a delusion if he thinks he is able to help someone else. In order to truly help someone else, I must understand more than he—but certainly first and foremost understand what he understands. If I do not do that, then my greater understanding does not help him at all. If I nevertheless want to assert my greater understanding, then it is because I am vain or proud, then basically instead of benefitting him I really want to be admired by him. But all true helping begins with a humbling. The helper must first humble himself under the person he wants to help and thereby understand that to help is not to dominate but to serve, that to help is not to be the most dominating but the most patient, that to help is a willingness for the time being to put up with being in the wrong and not understanding what the other understands.⁶³

On this approach, the critic not only tries to help the interlocutor, but takes care to convey this non-antagonistic relationship to her. Rather than passing judgment, the critic goes out of his or her way to listen to the interlocutor and imaginatively enter into their perspective. Kierkegaard elsewhere calls the one who does this a “ministering critic,” writing “A critic is, ought to be, a ministering spirit; he is and ought to be, in the sense of ideality, the author’s best friend, because he loves the author in his idea. As soon as the author gives a hint from the region in which he is or in which he wants to be, the critic immediately makes a survey, then changes his clothes

⁶³ *The Point of View*, 45.

according to the region and the sphere, serving *e concessis* [on the basis of the other's premises], and from now on is the author's trusty friend."⁶⁴

The ministering critic's approach is explicitly non-antagonistic, but that does not mean it is the same as the "joining" approach advocated by Gearhart.⁶⁵ The ministering critic charitably begins where the interlocutor is, but the persuasion takes the form of a guiding, a helping to find the truth. Wittgenstein summarized this well, "To convince someone of the truth, it is not enough to state it, but rather one must find the *path* from error to truth."⁶⁶

This effort to meet the interlocutor where they are must be done out of a genuine compassion for the other and a desire to help them find the truth, but that does not mean that the critic is immediately forthright about their intentions. Kierkegaard believes that in order to avoid being treated as an antagonist and to be trusted enough to minister, one may need to hide one's rhetorical goals and obscure one's own position. He talks about this in terms of "the incognito" and "deception," writing,

What, then, does it mean 'to deceive'? It means that one does not begin *directly* with what one wishes to communicate but begins by taking the other's delusion at face value. Thus one does not begin (to hold to what essentially is the theme of this book) in this way: I am a Christian, you are not a Christian—but this way: You are a Christian, I am not a Christian. Or one does not begin in this way: It is Christianity that I am proclaiming, and you are living in purely esthetic categories. No, one begins this way: Let us talk about the esthetic. The deception consists in one's speaking this way precisely in order to arrive at the religious. But according to the assumption the other person is in fact under the delusion that the esthetic is the essentially Christian, since he thinks he is a Christian and yet he is living in esthetic categories.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1998), 31, 18. Cf. Tietjen, *Kierkegaard, Communication, and Virtue*, 83–84.

⁶⁵ See chapter 1, section III.

⁶⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, eds. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 119. Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1932–1935, from the Notes of Alice Ambrose and Margaret Macdonald*, ed. Alice Ambrose (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 109.

⁶⁷ *The Point of View*, 54. David Gouwens clarifies that by "living in esthetic categories," Kierkegaard means "living for pleasure." *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15–16.

Thus, as Kierkegaard later narrates it, his early pseudonymous writings seem like purely literary or purely philosophical books, although his goals were religious—we might even say evangelistic—from the start.⁶⁸

Kierkegaard's going "incognito" as a Romantic esthete, a dutiful traditionalist, and a sagacious philosopher in his pseudonymous works is not merely an effort to make readers trust him by appearing to think like them, although that certainly is a factor.⁶⁹ At a deeper level, Kierkegaard's tactic involves showing that rather than these life-views comprehending the religious and surpassing it, the religious life-view is "higher" than its evidently more enlightened competitors. Here, too, the illusions Kierkegaard is challenging—that the cosmopolitan poetic lifestyle is a liberation from drab religious conformity, that Hegelian philosophizing is superior to ordinary Christian piety, that to be a trustworthy spouse and citizen is fulfilling one's religious duty—are factored into his rhetorical approach. He acts as a "spy," proving that he has an insider's understanding of each of these life-views while at the same time not finding a home in any of them.⁷⁰ He writes,

The world has become all too sagacious. The person who intends to work for the religious must work undercover—otherwise he is not of much use. If someone passes himself off as religious, the world has a thousand evasions and illusions with which they protect themselves against him and get rid of him. The struggle now is no longer as it was in the old days against wild passions against which direct action is appropriate. No, Christendom has run aground in sagacity. In

⁶⁸ "Kierkegaard's lengthy literature is frankly and unabashedly evangelical. It aims to bring his learned reader into discussion and concern about religious, and particularly Christian, matters." Paul L. Holmer, *On Kierkegaard and the Truth*, 193. Cf. Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 23, 90. Identifying Kierkegaard's goals as religious does not exclude the fact that he intended them to be literary and philosophical accomplishments in their own right.

⁶⁹ See Robert Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 140–42 on how people tend to trust those who are like them. Cialdini cites a study which shows people tend to believe an author's writings reflect the author's true attitudes, even if they know the author was assigned to argue for a specific position (*Influence*, 77). This may help explain how the pseudonyms could be effective in Kierkegaard's time even though most readers knew the real author's identity.

⁷⁰ *The Point of View*, 87–89. Cf. 57–70 on the early Kierkegaard's masquerading as a witty esthete. Again, we may doubt the truth of *The Point of View* as an autobiography and still find much of value in it as a philosophy of communication.

order to get rid of it, there must be a person who is more than a match for them in sagacity.⁷¹

In this situation, a direct proponent of Christianity will likely be interpreted as propounding a viewpoint that the interlocutors *have developed beyond*, be it colorless pietism, unreflective credulity, or monastic legalism.⁷² Kierkegaard first needed to demonstrate that he understood the logic of the so-called higher positions in order to make his case for a life-view that at first glance resembles a so-called lower position. Only then could he credibly expose the contradictions and limitations of the sagacious life-views of his age.⁷³ His persuasive approach is, as Christopher Ben Simpson writes, “out-narrating” competing life-views rather than directly objecting to them.⁷⁴ Kierkegaard first shows that he understands these life-views from within, that he possesses the wisdom the illusion seems to provide, before making evident the cracks and self-deceptions within the illusion and guiding readers to a deeper truth.

An analogy might be useful here. Imagine a duchess decides to host a ball. She spreads the word across the land, but the morning of the ball she falls ill and decides to cancel it. She tells a few people the celebration is off and asks them to pass the message along. That afternoon, seeing how dejected her children are that the ball is cancelled, the duchess changes her mind yet again and decides that she will host the ball after all. Word reaches the baron, who remarks to the

⁷¹ *The Point of View*, 163. He adds, “The person who is to be used in this way must possess what the age prides itself on, but to its own misfortune. But he must not use his sagacity to be of assistance to a new sagacity; with the aid of sagacity, he must effect a return to simplicity.” *The Point of View*, 163.

⁷² As an analogy, imagine how ludicrous one would appear if one argued for monarchism in a contemporary liberal democracy. Even if people do not have arguments for democracy’s superiority to monarchy, the question is considered settled. Someone who fancies themselves post-X will not have much patience for viewpoints that sound like X.

⁷³ Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works thus each have an element of parody to them. On parody and persuasion, see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000). On *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* as a philosophical parody, see James Conant, “Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense” in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, eds. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 195–224.

⁷⁴ *The Truth Is the Way*, 16–17, 72–73.

count that he is looking forward to that evening's ball, to which the count replies, "Oh haven't you heard? The ball has been cancelled." The baron insists, "No, the ball will happen tonight." They will go on disputing like this until the baron is able to convey that *he knows what the count knows*—that the ball was cancelled—but also *knows something that the count does not know*—that this cancellation has been annulled and everyone will dance as originally planned.

Similarly, Kierkegaard maintains that in order to convince sagacious people, one must first convince them that one understands what they understand, and only then point them to the truth they lack. Where the baron-count analogy falls short is that the ministering critic does not simply need to indicate that he or she knows the same information as the interlocutor. The critic must show that he or she can see the world through the life-view the interlocutor has, can recognize the appeal and relative coherence of this perspective. Ministering criticism requires conveying an imaginative appreciation of the interlocutor's viewpoint, not just demonstrating factual superiority over the interlocutor.

Kierkegaard believes that in his situation, the incognito—hiding one's intentions, masquerading in order to subvert suspicions—is necessary in order to get past the defenses his sagacious contemporaries have built up against the religious.⁷⁵ His arguments for this are reasonable, but this approach may seem morally dubious. Kierkegaard's descriptions—deception, being a spy, "attacks from behind"⁷⁶—may give the impression that this approach is manipulative, the tricks of a con artist rather than the honesty of a Christian communicator. There may be some truth to this objection, but the ministering approach need not be carried out

⁷⁵ Cf. I Corinthians 9:19–23. Kierkegaard refers to this passage in *Journals and Papers*, 4:3915.

⁷⁶ *Christian Discourses*, 162. Cf. *The Point of View*, 43.

in a manipulative way.⁷⁷ I will discuss this in greater depth in chapter 6, but a few observations can be made here.

At times Kierkegaard talks about indirect communication as a strategy, and at other times he talks about it as an expression of compassion. George Pattison writes that for Kierkegaard,

The Christian writer must therefore begin by sympathetically entering into and portraying the very position from which, in the long term, he is seeking to liberate his readers. Kierkegaard, therefore, begins by presenting in some detail the ‘aesthetic’ attitude which he regards as the typical attitude of modern bourgeois society in order to expose its inner contradictions and so lure the reader on to a confrontation with Christianity as an alternative stance towards life that is worth taking seriously. Such a confrontation can never, in his view, be achieved simply by denouncing the shortcomings of the non-Christian world and proclaiming the virtues of faith. The Christian communicator must enter into the inner situation of those to whom he is concerned to communicate and, in doing so, will conceal his identity and purpose behind an incognito that is effective only to the extent that it is impenetrable.⁷⁸

Note some of the words Pattison uses—“sympathetic,” “liberate,” “enter into the inner situation.”

These echo Kierkegaard’s own descriptions of indirect communication—humbling, loving, taking care to find someone, understanding what they understand. This involves patient, compassionate listening to the voices of the interlocutors. Though concealing one’s identity and purpose may be deceptive, the goal is not to betray someone’s trust but rather to get past their initial distrust and build trust, a trust rooted in genuinely understanding what the interlocutor believes and values, and genuinely desiring to help them find the truth that will set them free.

Kierkegaard writes, “to help is not to dominate but to serve,” this is not just giving the appearance of serving (purely tactical) nor just acting with the intent to serve (purely idealistic) but acting in such a way that the one receiving the help *can recognize it as help*. They can

⁷⁷ Kierkegaard recognizes some of this moral ambiguity, writing, “When a person uses the indirect method, there is in one way or another something demonic—but not necessarily in the bad sense—about it, as, for example, with Socrates.” *Journals and Papers*, 2:1959, cf. 1:653.

⁷⁸ Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith*, 4–5.

recognize it as a compassionate act from someone on their side, even if they do not at first recognize it for what it also is: an attack on their illusions.

III.B. Not Zero-Sum, but a Corrective

“The world is like a drunken peasant; if you help him up on one side of the horse, he falls off the other side.”⁷⁹ With this quotation from Martin Luther, Kierkegaard expresses his attitude toward history—including and especially his attitude toward Luther. On Kierkegaard’s reading, Luther had helped Christian Europe up on one side of the horse only for Christendom to fall off the other side. Kierkegaard’s discussions of Luther illustrate the second aspect of indirect communication: dialectically contextualizing one’s own contribution as a corrective to the misunderstandings of one’s interlocutors.

As Kierkegaard writes, every situation has its illusions, and every culture its own widely shared illusions. Often, the shared assumptions of a time period are adhered to because they were reactions to the perceived problems of previous time periods. “All development is dialectical;” Kierkegaard writes, “the ‘next generation’ will always need the ‘opposite’ as corrective.”⁸⁰ Cultures swing, pendulum-like, from one excess to the other. As Kierkegaard saw it, Luther’s reformation challenged the excesses of European Catholic Christendom.⁸¹ Although this was a salutary development, in Lutheran countries it also had the effect of swinging the pendulum to the opposite extreme. Kierkegaard writes,

Luther's emphasis is a corrective—but a corrective made into the normative, into the sum total, is *eo ipso* confusing in another generation (where that for which it was a corrective does not exist). And with every generation that goes by in this

⁷⁹ Martin Luther, quoted in *For Self-Examination*, 24. The quotation can be found in *Luther’s Works, Vol. 54: Table Talk*, trans. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 111.

⁸⁰ *Journals and Papers*, 1:710.

⁸¹ “The error of the Middle Ages was in imagining that men could possibly manage to be like Christ. From this came sanctification by works and the like. Then came Luther and quite rightly emphasized Christ as gift and made the same distinction between Christ as gift and as pattern as between faith and works.” *Journals and Papers*, 2:2503.

way, it must become worse, until the end result is that this corrective, which has independently established itself, produces characteristics exactly the opposite of the original.

And this has been the case. Luther's corrective, when it independently is supposed to be the sum total of Christianity, produces the most refined kind of secularism and paganism.⁸²

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the significance of a statement is dependent upon the situation in which it is uttered. To proclaim the same statement in a different situation is to do a different act entirely.⁸³ As Kierkegaard saw it, Luther's emphasis on grace was saving truth in the situation Luther was in, but the situation has changed. He writes, "Luther was confronted by the exaggerated misuse of Christ as pattern; therefore he accentuates the opposite. But Luther has long since been victorious in Protestantism and Christ has been completely forgotten as the pattern, and the whole thing actually has become pretense in hidden inwardness."⁸⁴ Put differently, in a situation in which *the demand* was overemphasized, Luther emphasized *the gift* as a corrective. Luther's inheritors in eighteenth-century Denmark, in turn, neglected the demand and overemphasized the gift.⁸⁵ Thus the "burlesque version of the doctrine of grace" Kierkegaard saw rampant in his society was not due merely to human permissiveness, but was justified by a decontextualized appeal to Luther.⁸⁶

In Kierkegaard's view, then, Lutheranism in Christendom is half-true. To the extent that Danish culture emphasizes the gift at the expense of the demand, it misconstrues the Christian

⁸² *Journals and Papers*, 1:711.

⁸³ *Journals and Papers*, 1:678, 4:4056, 4:4059, 4:4546.

⁸⁴ *Journals and Papers* 2:2503. Stephen Backhouse summarizes this point, "The reformation betrays itself when it simply allows one form of anemic cultural Christianity to replace another. Instead, authentic Christianity is ever new, reforming itself with every generation and every individual," *Kierkegaard: A Single Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 259.

⁸⁵ This is not to say that one needs a balance between them. A better way to think of it is that both need to be maintained simultaneously, and the tension between them helps guide Christians into living out existence-communication. Mark Taylor writes that Kierkegaard sees in his contemporaries "a relaxation of the spiritual tensions essential to authentic individuality." *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 53.

⁸⁶ *For Self-Examination*, 16.

gospel.⁸⁷ This has implications for Kierkegaard's rhetorical approach. As he sees it, his interlocutors are neither totally ignorant nor totally wrong—for interlocutors like those, a direct approach is fitting⁸⁸—but rather people who believe a half-truth but are under the impression that it is the whole truth.⁸⁹ To write as a “corrective” is to write so one's interlocutors can hold on to the facets of truth they know, while also coming to believe and act on the facets which they are missing.⁹⁰ This means that the critic is always agreeing with the interlocutor while at the same time criticizing the interlocutor, even if the agreement or the disagreement is temporarily concealed by the incognito.

Kierkegaard writes, “My task has been to apply a corrective to the established order, not to introduce something new that might nullify or supplant it.”⁹¹ Put differently, Kierkegaard does not presuppose a zero-sum contest in which only the critic or the interlocutor knows the timelessly true. Rather, the ministering critic can help the interlocutor understand what he or she already believes in a different light.

It is easy to think of theological disagreements as courtroom dramas in which there are two opposing sides, only one side can be right, and each side makes points and objections that

⁸⁷ “Christianity's requirement is this: your life should express works as strenuously as possible; and then one more thing is required—that you humble yourself and confess: But my being saved is nevertheless grace.” *For Self-Examination*, 17.

⁸⁸ *The Point of View*, 53–54.

⁸⁹ Something can be half-true or close to the truth and still be dangerous. In fact, Kierkegaard believes that the half-true is often more dangerous than the patently false. *Journals and Papers*, 4:4853, 4:4884.

⁹⁰ Writing as a corrective is an important theme of Pascal's reflections on communication. Pascal's apologetic depends on readers coming face to face both with their own glory and their own wretchedness, then turning to Christianity which alone can reconcile these two contrasting truths. Hence, “If he exalts himself, I humble him; if he humbles himself, I exalt him.” *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1995), §130. Cf. “Discussion with Monsieur de Sacy” in *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 182–92.

⁹¹ *For Self-Examination*, 256. Thinking in terms of correctives does not entail a progressive view of intellectual development. Kierkegaard writes, “My view is certainly not that it is the essentially Christian that should be improved and perfected by new modifications—I am not that speculative. No, my view is that the essentially Christian, unchanged, at times may need by way of new modifications to secure itself against the new, the new nonsense that is in vogue.” *The Point of View*, 131.

the opposing side must answer. By framing his points as a corrective, Kierkegaard seeks to get past this oppositional framework, encouraging the interlocutor to seek the truth rather than to respond to objections or defend beliefs.

Kierkegaard's corrective is thus rooted in compassion for his interlocutors, commitment to the truth more so than to his own camp, and an acknowledgment that his interlocutors are getting something—in this case, the content of Christian doctrine—correct.⁹² He situates his own theological intervention, not in opposition to Lutheranism, but as a corrective in keeping with the spirit of Luther himself.⁹³

But is Kierkegaard correct in saying that nineteenth-century Danes are caught in an illusion due to a misappropriation of Luther's emphasis on grace? Would it not be more accurate to say that they are simply lazy and sinful, and that they latch onto grace disingenuously to rationalize their behavior? This is an interesting historical question, but for Kierkegaard's rhetorical purposes it does not actually matter. His account does not need to be the most accurate description; it only needs to be a plausible description. For the rest of this section, we will discuss why this is so.

To explicitly situate one's own intervention as a corrective involves telling a story about one's interlocutors that describes why they believe and do what they believe and do. This story contextualizes the interlocutors' views and actions and provides the interlocutors with a way of making sense of themselves. As Kierkegaard writes, "It is always the explanation that makes something what it now becomes."⁹⁴ If one explains one's interlocutor's motives, it offers a

⁹² "Lutheran doctrine is excellent, is the truth." *For Self-Examination*, 24. Cf. *Journals and Papers*, 1:678.

⁹³ *Journals and Papers*, 2:2518, 2:2503; *For Self-Examination*, 24. Dietrich Bonhoeffer shares this approach, and writes, "Already one hundred years ago Kierkegaard said that Luther today would say the opposite of what he said back then." *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 123.

⁹⁴ *Works of Love*, 291. This does not mean that an activity can be described an infinite number of ways, and Kierkegaard accepts that some wrongdoing cannot be accounted for by a mitigating explanation.

framework for them to enter into imaginatively. The explanation can be an invitation for them to re-integrate their lives around a new narrative. This is itself an act of persuasion, but it can also make one's further persuasive efforts more believable.

If an explanation attributes evil motives to the interlocutors, the interlocutors will be unlikely to accept it as a story about themselves.⁹⁵ If, however, a story paints their beliefs and actions as the product of an understandable misjudgment—still wrong and in need of correction, but the sort of error a reasonable, well-intentioned person could make—they are more likely to integrate that story with their own self-understanding. Kierkegaard calls this a “mitigating explanation.”⁹⁶ This charitable interpretation invites them to understand their lives—and thus perhaps to live—in a different way. It also frames the issue in a way that makes it easier for your interlocutors to recognize the truth in the critic's corrective. Counter-intuitively, a charitable interpretation can be one of the most effective tools in a critic's toolbox, especially when the goal is to change people's minds and behavior rather than to score points in a zero-sum contest. This is a crucial point which we will revisit in chapter 6.

Consider Kierkegaard's account of why people believe the illusion of objective Christianity, and why they refuse to recognize the individuated, self-involving character of Christian truth. He writes,

Christianity has been abolished by the ubiquitous relegating of personality into the background. People seem to fear that an *I* might be a kind of tyranny, and therefore every *I* might be a kind of tyranny, and therefore every *I* must be leveled and pushed behind some objectivity. I must not have the right to say: I believe

⁹⁵ Pascal writes, “When we want to correct someone usefully and show him he is wrong, we must see from what point of view he is approaching the matter, for it is usually right from that point of view, and we must admit this, but show him the point of view from which it is wrong. This will please him, because he will see that he was not wrong but merely failed to see every aspect of the question.” *Pensées*, §701. Psychological studies show that people generally think of themselves as good and react against any description that attributes simply evil motives to them. See Joshua Aronson, Geoffrey Cohen, and Paul Nail, “Self-Affirmation Theory: An Update and Appraisal” in *Cognitive Dissonance*, eds. Eddie Harmon-Jones and Judson Mills (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1999).

⁹⁶ *Works of Love*, 289–96.

there is a God—I must say: This is Christian doctrine and I believe it, but then this *I* is a more universal *I*, not my personal *I*. There is doctrine, objectivity everywhere, and one is prevented everywhere from getting an impression that a person is in direct relation to God.⁹⁷

In this passage, Kierkegaard offers a mitigating explanation for why Danish Christians relate to Christianity merely as a set of doctrines: As a corrective against self-centeredness, people have fled to the opposite extreme and fail to recognize that they are themselves addressed by God. Kierkegaard does not downplay the *consequences* of this error (“Christianity has been abolished”) but the *motives* given for the error are such that Kierkegaard’s interlocutors can more readily identify with them and admit their veracity.

By telling the story this way—while recognizing there are other plausible ways to tell the story—Kierkegaard makes it less likely for his interlocutors to get defensive, more likely for them to adopt a new self-understanding, more likely to accept correction, and more likely to keep all parties involved seeking the truth rather than getting wrapped up in zero-sum oppositions.

III.C. Not an Idea to be Considered, but a Summons to Act

“When the ‘monastery’ is the deviation,” Kierkegaard writes, “faith must be affirmed; when the ‘professor’ is the deviation, imitation must be affirmed.”⁹⁸ That is to say, in Luther’s time, the prevailing illusion was the idea of merited grace, but the prevailing illusion in Kierkegaard’s own time is that Christianity is a system of doctrines and ideas to be evaluated dispassionately, and if believed, believed in a generic way. We can call the latter “intellectualized Christianity.”⁹⁹ As with the other illusions we have discussed, intellectualized

⁹⁷ *Journals and Papers*, 4:4548.

⁹⁸ *For Self-Examination*, 196. Cf. 209.

⁹⁹ Kierkegaard opposed intellectualized Christianity, but as David Gouwens notes, it is misleading to call Kierkegaard anti-intellectual. *Kierkegaard as a Religious Author*, 51–54. Many interpreters equate what I am calling intellectualized Christianity with Hegelianism, and with good reason, but we will leave that question aside.

Christianity is more of a tendency than a self-avowed position—if asked, people might not say Christianity is chiefly a matter of intellectual assent, yet they continue to act as if it were.

As we have seen, Kierkegaard believes the needed corrective in this situation is to make people aware of the self-involving character of Christian truth. Intellectualized Christianity emphasizes the objective over the subjective and the generic over the individuated, and treats ethical and religious truths as matters of putative knowledge one can “stand outside” and evaluate at arm’s length.¹⁰⁰

Kierkegaard believes this is a misunderstanding of the grammar of ethical and the religious truth. In the “Two Lectures on Communication,” he offers the following parable, “They tell a story about an army recruit who was supposed to learn to drill. The sergeant said to him: You, there, stand up straight. Recruit: ‘Sure enough.’ Sergeant: ‘Yes, and don't talk during drill.’ Recruit: ‘All right, I won't do that.’ Sergeant: ‘No, you are not supposed to talk during drill.’ Recruit: ‘Yes, yes, if I just know it.’”¹⁰¹ In this comedic scene, the recruit makes the mistake of interpreting the sergeant’s words as conveying information rather than giving commands. Intellectualized Christianity makes a similar mistake.¹⁰² People under this illusion treat Christianity first and foremost as a system of doctrines and neglect, postpone, or disparage the demands to die to yourself, follow Christ, love your neighbor, and depend entirely on God’s grace.

¹⁰⁰ *Journals and Papers*, 4:4967. The concept has secular analogues; James Conant writes, “The philosopher is particularly prone, on this view of him, to convert the practical difficulty of living a certain sort of life with the intellectual difficulty of trying to understand how it is one can become a person who leads such a life.” In “Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense,” 205.

¹⁰¹ *Journals and Papers*, 1:290. Cf. 1:273.

¹⁰² Kierkegaard seems to be suggesting that philosophy of religion as typically understood is based on a misunderstanding. I will not in this dissertation discuss whether this is the best interpretation of his thought, nor whether this idea is correct. We can minimally conclude in a situation in which people are liable to view Christianity as a system of objective ideas, one interested in recovering the existential dimension of Christianity would be well served to steer clear of this mode of reflection, even if in other situations it may have merit.

In this situation, Kierkegaard has to be especially careful not to give his readers the impression that his own contribution is another idea to be considered. As David Gouwens writes, Kierkegaard's style "aims at preventing understanding unaccompanied to inner change."¹⁰³ Kierkegaard takes pains to communicate in ways that impede his readers from interpreting his works as offering objective reflections on ethics and religion. He does not simply argue that people ought to move beyond objective reflection—if he did, they might simply objectively reflect on his arguments. On this point, he writes,

If people had forgotten what it means to exist religiously, they had probably also forgotten what it means to exist humanly; therefore this would have to be brought out. But this must not on any account be done didactically, because then the misunderstanding would in a new misunderstanding instantly make capital of the explanatory attempt, as if existing consisted in coming to know something about a particular point. If this is communicated as knowledge, the recipient is mistakenly induced to understand that he is gaining something to know, and then we are back in knowledge again. Only the person who has an idea of a misunderstanding's tenacity in assimilating even the most rigorous attempt at explanation and yet remaining a misunderstanding, only he will be aware of the difficulty of an authorship in which care must be taken with every word, and every word must go through the process of double-reflection. Direct communication about what it means to exist and about inwardness will only have the result that the speculative thinker will benevolently take it in hand and let one slip in along with it. The system is hospitable!¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Author*, 5. Gouwens extends to Kierkegaard the analysis Stanley Cavell makes of Wittgenstein's style. Cf. "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy" in Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 44–72.

¹⁰⁴ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 249–50. Cf. *Journals and Papers* 1:633. Paul Holmer writes, "Kierkegaard's literature with all of its variety and dramatic content is not a dramatic attack upon such [Hegelian] views. If it had been so contrived, it would, of course, have had most properly another and more pedagogical style. Instead he chooses a more difficult way. He wants his reader not to learn another set of philosophical doctrines, for then he would play directly into the hands of the commodious interpreters of the history of philosophy. His position would then be conceived to be one more phase in the evolution of concepts, another example illustrating the very outlook he was intent upon combating." *Kierkegaard and the Truth*, 51. Cf. Holmer, *Communicating the Faith Indirectly*, 14; Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith*, 88. Evans writes of the religious author, "the form of his communication must correspond to its content. Since the conceptual content of subjective communication is about existence, the communicator must, to prevent misunderstanding, avoid giving the impression that the content can be understood impersonally and abstractly. He must design his communication in such a way that the recipient is encouraged to apply the content to his own life and situation." *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 103–4.

That is to say, it would be self-betraying communication for Kierkegaard to present his challenge as another philosophical idea—this time an “existential” one—for objective consideration.¹⁰⁵ We will discuss Kierkegaard’s positive strategy for challenging intellectualized Christianity in the following section. In this section, we will focus on the pitfalls one needs to avoid in order to introduce Christianity within Christendom.

First, Kierkegaard insists that one must not try to defend Christianity. “To defend something,” he writes, “is always to disparage it.”¹⁰⁶ Kierkegaard is not saying that the truth of Christianity is so well-founded that there is no point in arguing with anyone who questions it. Rather, he is saying that to treat Christianity as a hypothesis, to weigh arguments for and against it, is to turn it into something it is not. Properly understood, Christianity demands passionate commitment of the whole self; the only responses that indicate one has understood this demand are *obedience* or *offense*. Christianity promises wholeness and redemption; the only responses that indicate one has understood this demand are *faith* or *despair*. In neither case is the objective, speculative posture of the detached thinker a reaction that indicates understanding. In the parable of the recruit, if the recruit had replied to the sergeant, “No, I refuse to be silent during drill!” this rejection would be closer to understanding the sergeant’s command than treating it as a piece of information to store away or a theory to consider. Similarly, someone who understands the demand of Christianity and takes offense to it, or insists that they cannot meet this demand, is closer to the truth of Christianity than someone who believes in it as a set of doctrines.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Put differently: to help his readers think and live existentially, Kierkegaard needs to avoid promoting “existentialism” as a philosophical idea. I make a similar point about pragmatism in “Pragmatism without the -Ism: Cavell, Rhetoric, and the Role of Doctrines in Philosophy,” *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁶ *The Sickness unto Death*, 87. Cf. *Christian Discourses*, 162; *Works of Love*, 200; *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 545–46, 608; *Journals and Papers* 1:824, 3:3073.

¹⁰⁷ Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Johannes Climacus says he is not a Christian because he cannot meet the demand. See Evans, *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript*, 52.

There is a danger to Kierkegaard's approach. By avoiding the temptation to defend Christianity, a Christian risks being seen as credulous, a person who believes for flimsy reasons or no reasons at all. Many apologists believe that in order to show Christianity is not a mere "leap of faith," Christians ought to develop arguments for the reasonableness of Christian belief. Kierkegaard sees this effort as self-betraying.¹⁰⁸ By offering reasons to the thinker who doubts the objective truth of Christianity, one implicitly confirms the picture they have of themselves as impartial judges who can withhold judgment until given sufficient reason to believe. According to Kierkegaard, this picture of the thinker-as-judge is false. The thinker is always already an existing person, imaginative and emotional, caught up in relational networks of demand and promise, forced at every moment to make decisions that reflect and shape their character. To treat as a matter of cognitive assent a truth that involves the whole person is to diminish this truth. Even if this apologetic effort brings intellectual respectability to Christianity, it comes at the cost of abolishing Christianity and contributing to an illusory picture of the human being.

Second, Kierkegaard seeks to overcome intellectualized Christianity not by showing how everything fits together in a neat, rational picture, but rather by dwelling on the paradoxes and absurdities of Christian faith.¹⁰⁹ Most famously, in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes de Silentio reflects at length on Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 as a limit case for theological reflection.¹¹⁰ Abraham's actions cannot be comprehended by human reason, cannot be justified within a system of ethics, and cannot readily be squared with characterizations of a loving God. Kierkegaard insists that we should not try to

¹⁰⁸ *For Self-Examination*, 68; *Christian Discourses*, 189–90; *Journals and Papers* 1:649; *Philosophical Fragments/Johannes Climacus* trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1985), 170. I believe there are still ways of doing apologetics that take Kierkegaard's charge seriously, and I hope to address question in a future project.

¹⁰⁹ *Journals and Papers*, 1:7, 2:1144, 2:1530, 3:3079, 3:3095.

¹¹⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1983).

rationalize away this incongruity, but dwell on it and allow it to call into question the categories we would use to evaluate it.

As we have discussed, Kierkegaard believes Christianity is not the sort of thing that could be comprehended by mere reason because Christianity makes demands on the whole existing person. He writes, “Christianity entered into the world not to be understood but to be existed in. This cannot be expressed more strongly than by the fact that Christianity itself proclaims itself to be a paradox.”¹¹¹ Kierkegaard does not simply exhort his readers to “exist in” Christianity, nor does he give the impression that his version of Christianity is a higher one, an existential one. Rather, he dwells on the elements of Christianity that cannot be neatly comprehended by objective reflection—the paradox of history and eternity, the paradox of the God-man, the paradox of faith as self-abasement and self-fulfillment. The goal is not to make Christianity seem irrational, but to compel readers to recognize that Christianity is more than merely rational.¹¹²

To this end, Kierkegaard writes in a way that eschews neat summary, emphasizing seemingly contradictory points. Paul Holmer gives one example, “The proposal that ‘truth is subjectivity’ [from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*] breaks the spell of the invariable association of ‘truth’ and ‘objective.’”¹¹³ Kierkegaard believes that the categories his interlocutors are using—however useful they are for scientific theorizing—are inadequate to the task of apprehending ethical and religious truth. In order to shake up these categories, he writes

¹¹¹ *Journals and Papers*, 3:3084.

¹¹² Evans writes, “The fact that this content is paradoxical in form and that it is the limit or boundary to reason should force the individual to see that the proper relation to assume toward it is not that of detached intellectual contemplation but existential commitment. The paradox should, like Kant’s antinomies, serve as a ‘hint’ to turn the individual from speculative to more practical issues.” *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript*, 241.

¹¹³ *On Kierkegaard and the Truth*, 131.

sentences, paragraphs, and entire books that do not fit current paradigms, not in the interest of disproving them, but in the interest of unsettling settled opinions.

“When the ‘professor’ is the deviation,” that is to say, when intellectualized Christianity has made it difficult for one’s interlocutors to recognize the individuated, self-involving aspect of the Christian message, Kierkegaard argues that it would be self-betraying to convey Christianity as a set of doctrines or a rational system. Here as elsewhere, Kierkegaard’s stylistic decisions, as well as his decisions on content, are made with consideration of the distinctive nature of his subject matter and his situation.

III.D. Not a Position to Agree with, but an Occasion for Self-Examination

Similar to Freire and Campbell, a fourth dimension of Kierkegaard’s ICC is a commitment to communicating so as to involve the interlocutor as an active participant. “The most interesting reading,” he writes, “is one in which the reader himself is to a certain degree productive.”¹¹⁴ This is especially the case when the concerned truth one seeks to communicate is a truth that needs to be subjectively appropriated, not just objectively assented to. Kierkegaard’s method of indirect communication involves tactics aimed at making the reader an active participant in the reading process, with the aim of encouraging the reader to take an active part in their own upbuilding.

Kierkegaard insists that he writes “without authority.”¹¹⁵ Since faith is essentially an encounter between the single individual and God, anyone who serves as a “middle term” can only get in the way. As we have discussed, Kierkegaard identifies as an illusion the practice of

¹¹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1987), 110.

¹¹⁵ See especially *For Self-Examination, The Point of View, The Book on Adler, and Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

comparing oneself to other people—especially “the crowd”—to determine whether or not one is Christian. Properly understood, Christianity is a matter of the single individual’s relation to God, even if this relation is formed and fostered in community with other people. A correlative illusion is to believe in Christian truth on another person’s authority. For Kierkegaard it is impossible to take someone’s word for it that you are a beloved sinner in the eyes of God; secondhand faith is a grammatical confusion. Kierkegaard’s thought on this matter is paradoxical, and I will not analyze it in any detail.¹¹⁶ At a minimum, we can say that reading an author as an authority is more likely to distract readers from the inward reflection and holistic commitment required by religion than to facilitate it. First, to treat someone as an authority, in this sense, is to agree with them without doing the work of examining whether what they say is true. Reading an authority is passive, whereas faith for Kierkegaard is essentially active. Second, when readers *are* critically engaged, they are liable to question whether or not the author is a credible authority, which can distract from the issue at hand. Finally, treating authors as authorities can lead to the formation of factions (the “I follow Paul”/“I follow Apollos” problem in the New Testament¹¹⁷) which incline readers to compare themselves to others rather than to existential self-examination. Kierkegaard reiterated that making his readers into Kierkegaardians would be self-betraying communication.

¹¹⁶ See his account of how one must “stand alone—by another’s help” in *Journals and Papers*, 1:650. Cf. *Journals and Papers*, 1:238, 1:650, 2:1441, 4:4750; *Works of Love*, 274–79; *Philosophical Fragments*, 10; *Stages on Life’s Way*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1988), 344. Antony Aumann gives a helpful analysis on Kierkegaard’s views on authority. See Aumann, “Kierkegaard and the Need for Indirect Communication,” 66–78.

¹¹⁷ I Corinthians 3. George Pattison writes that Kierkegaard’s indirect communication is designed to be “a method that would defy all attempts at facile and superficial appropriation and would bring about a pause in the otherwise non-stop flow of verbiage that carries writers and readers alike off into meaninglessness. Without such a method, he believed, his work could too easily turn into a political cause (perhaps a kind of party of individualism), or else be neatly slotted into the system (as some Kierkegaard interpreters have since managed to do).” *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith*, 27–28. Cf. *The Point of View*, 133.

In order to encourage readers to read his books “without authority,” Kierkegaard published books under a variety of pseudonyms. Kierkegaard was not especially concerned with secrecy; many of Kierkegaard’s contemporaries knew who actually wrote the pseudonymous works. As Stephen Backhouse writes, “The pseudonyms are not watertight, neither are they meant to deceive utterly and completely. Instead, pseudonymity is a mechanism by which the reader is forced to pause and consider their own relation to the text rather than to the author.”¹¹⁸ Even if readers come to trust Kierkegaard and treat him as an authority, they cannot simply become passive readers, because the different pseudonyms express conflicting views. The many unanswered questions, counter-intuitive statements, and unresolved dialogues in Kierkegaard’s writings serve the same purpose.¹¹⁹ To the degree that Kierkegaard is obscure, it is not because he is trying to seem intelligent or to evade criticism.¹²⁰ He is trying to weave a spiderweb so fine it lets everything through save the single individual. Kierkegaard makes himself difficult to agree with, because the point is not to agree with him but to change your life.

Instead of trying to convince his readers to *believe something*, Kierkegaard first and foremost wants to persuade his readers to *do something*, namely, self-examination. As we have discussed, convincing them that this action is worth doing is not the same as persuading them to do it; one can intellectually agree that something is worthwhile without acting on it.¹²¹ In some

¹¹⁸ *Kierkegaard: A Single Life*, 115.

¹¹⁹ “The fact that many of Plato’s dialogues end without a result has a far deeper basis than I had thought earlier. They are a reproduction of Socrates’ maieutic skill which makes the reader or hearer himself active, and therefore they do not end in a result but in a sting. This is an excellent parody of the modern rote-method which says everything the sooner the better and all at one time, which awakens no self-action but only leads the reader to rattle it off like a parrot.” *Journals and Papers*, 4:4266.

¹²⁰ Contrast this with Michel Foucault’s claims about Parisian intellectuals. Mike Springer, “John Searle on Foucault and the Obscurantism in French Philosophy,” *Open Culture*, July 1, 2013, http://www.openculture.com/2013/07/jean_searle_on_foucault_and_the_obscurantism_in_french_philosophy.html.

¹²¹ One example: if asked, I would say that I believe local politics are important and people should be more involved in them. I am not in any way involved in local politics, and act as if it were insignificant. This belief, if we want to call it a belief, is mere intellectual agreement without existential commitment. For a more complex analysis of the different kinds of assent, see John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

cases, explaining why an action is worth doing may actually make people less likely to do it. For example, say there is a movie that does not look very good from the previews, but has a twist ending that redeems it. Knowing you enjoy movies with twists, I conclude that you would really like it. I cannot simply tell you there is a twist; that would ruin it. To persuade you to watch the movie, I might need to be indirect. I may need to be temporarily deceptive and trust that you will forgive the deception after you see the ending.

When it comes to religion, the stakes are infinitely higher, but the principle is similar. People are reluctant to examine themselves, to confront their own self-deceptions, and to admit their own need for divine grace. Only after they have gone through this process can they fully recognize it as liberating and upbuilding. Kierkegaard's pseudonymous texts are, according to his own interpretation, efforts at tricking people into examining their own lives. A person needs to go through this process of reflection for themselves; they cannot simply be told the results by someone else. Given their present misunderstanding, hearing the results of the process may dissuade them from going through the process.¹²² This is deceptive, but it is deceptive only in the sense of temporarily withholding information rather than giving false information.¹²³ It is debatable whether or not Kierkegaard's approach is manipulative, but three observations deserve mentioning: (1) Since Kierkegaard's interlocutors are self-deceived and double-minded, his works aim at getting them to do something they simultaneously desire and fear. He is not tricking them to do something they do not want, only enabling them to overcome the hurdles they have set up to the self-understanding they seek.¹²⁴ (2) Hyperbolic language notwithstanding,

¹²² Abraham Joshua Heschel writes, "[Kierkegaard] reiterates the assertion that Truth is subjectivity, and that it can be acquired only through reflection, never as a finished product from somebody else's mind." *A Passion for Truth* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973), 105. Cf. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 80; *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 79, 242, 276–277; *The Point of View* 50–56.

¹²³ Kierkegaard called it "truth's way of deceiving." *The Point of View*, 58. Cf. *Journals and Papers*, 1:649.

¹²⁴ Katherine M. Ramsland writes, "The communicator wants simply to display possibilities to the recipients so that they will regard them in some relation to themselves. Recipients are not so much manipulated as disarmed of their

Kierkegaard does not force his readers to do anything. There is no threat or reward, readers can always choose to close the book. It is more accurate to say that Kierkegaard creates an occasion in which people can allow themselves to be confronted by the truth.¹²⁵ (3) Kierkegaard's writing is what George Pattison calls "a pedagogy of freedom."¹²⁶ His goal is paradoxically to compel readers to judge for themselves, freed from social pressure—even pressure from Kierkegaard himself—to see themselves through the eyes of God.¹²⁷

In addition to refraining from offering results and conclusions, Kierkegaard puts his readers to work. "For example," he writes, "it is indirect communication to place jest and earnestness together in such a way that the composite is a dialectical knot—and then to be a nobody oneself. If anyone wants to have anything to do with this kind of communication, he will have to untie the knot himself."¹²⁸ Kierkegaard sees his proximate goal as overcoming the inertia of the various dogmatisms, which cannot be done either by simply agreeing with or simply disagreeing with interlocutors' prior attitudes. The critic must present the interlocutor with a problem which the interlocutor cannot easily solve with their existing conceptual tools. Even if they go on to dismiss the author, misread the author, or abandon the question, the interlocutor is

resistance and defense so that they can be offered what is their own." *Engaging the Immediate: Applying Kierkegaard's Concept of Indirect Communication to the Practice of Psychotherapy* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 84.

¹²⁵ Cf. Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 102–7.

¹²⁶ "What he wanted, as a writer, was to challenge and provoke his readers into thinking and deciding for themselves about the issues he raised. The content of the teaching was itself the actualization of the learner's freedom. In this respect he liked to compare his task with that of Socrates, who, in his own words, had been a kind of midwife, bringing others' thoughts to birth, or, still more apt in Kierkegaard's case, a gadfly, stinging them into thinking for themselves. Socrates pursued his goal by means of a question-and-answer in situations of live dialogue. Kierkegaard, as a writer, had to use different methods, and he developed a range of literary 'alienation effects' to disrupt the sort of immediate sympathy and familiarity with which most authors are at pains to establish with their readers. These effects included a baffling variety of pseudonyms, the prolific use of books-within-books, the juxtaposition of diverse literary genres within a single text (e.g., novels, letters, aphorisms, philosophical discourses, and sermons all packed together into one book) and other even more complicated and *recherché* techniques." Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith*, 5.

¹²⁷ See *For Self-Examination/Judge for Yourself!*.

¹²⁸ *Practice in Christianity*, 133. Cf. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 298, "Thus it is left to the reader to put it all together by himself..."

for a brief moment made to reflect on their own habits of interpreting. In Kierkegaard's terms the interlocutor is made "aware"¹²⁹ of their own categories as well as the possibility that these categories do not exhaust the phenomena. Hence, though the work of untying a dialectical knot is not the same as the work of coming to faith, it can prepare readers to reevaluate their own life-views.

Finally, Kierkegaard compares his indirect communication with Socrates's "maieutic" approach. Socrates likens himself to a midwife, saying that rather than making his own conclusions, he merely brings forth the ideas that his interlocutors already believed.¹³⁰ As we have discussed, Kierkegaard does not want his readers to passively accept his conclusions, but to embark on a journey of self-examination on which they come face-to-face with the demand, the fall, the gift, and the ongoing task of existence-communication. Even when he cannot guide them through this journey, he encourages them to become aware, to take an active interest in their own existence. Kierkegaard does not want his readers to receive, but to react. Reading Kierkegaard's books, more so than other books, is a participatory activity. Readers are not presented with a completed dish to consume, as it were, but the fragments of a recipe they need to piece together, making their own contributions to fill in the gaps.

In Kierkegaard's view, the reader's effort and the reader's contributions are integral to the appropriation of the message. It is true, as Pascal writes, that "We are usually convinced more easily by reasons we have found ourselves than by those which have occurred to others."¹³¹

¹²⁹ *The Point of View*, 50–53.

¹³⁰ Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. John McDowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹³¹ Pascal, *Pensées* §737. Kierkegaard makes a similar point in *Journals and Papers*, 1:629. This argument is found implicitly in Aristotle's account of enthymemes in *Rhetoric* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004). More recent research in the psychology of persuasion supports this notion. See Anthony Greenwald, "Cognitive Learning, Cognitive Response to Persuasion, and Attitude Change" in *Psychological Foundations of Attitudes*, eds. Anthony Greenwald, Timothy Brock, and Thomas Ostrom (New York: Academic Press, 1968), 147–70. Mary John Smith summarizes this research, "Cognitive response theory suggests that people adopt new attitudes and behaviors on the basis of the

But on a deeper level, for Kierkegaard the truth of Christianity cannot be believed any other way. In order for the Christian gospel to be individuated, to be true *for me*, I need to recognize it as such.

Kierkegaard's point here is difficult to summarize, but a distinction from William James is helpful. James distinguished between the "I" and the "me," with the "I" being the subjective self and the "me" being the objective self.¹³² Other people can tell me facts about myself, about "me," and I can believe these facts mediated through their interpretations. By contrast, the "I" is my ego as I act with it, my own first-person perspective. The "me" includes the parts of my self I identify with, the "I" is the part of the self that does the identifying.

For Kierkegaard, Christian confessions like "I am a sinner," "I stand in need of divine grace," and "I am beloved" need to be confessed by the "I," not just admitted as true statements about "me." Through maieutic writing, Kierkegaard encourages readers not merely to acquiesce to descriptions of themselves, but to actively assert their identity and in the process to discover deeper truths about themselves. To borrow a term from Kevin Hector, Christian faith requires *mineness*, and the maieutic is Kierkegaard's method of facilitating this in his readers.¹³³ In Kierkegaard's theology of communication, the essentially Christian confession is an active, independent self-discovery, and to directly report to someone their status before God is to get in the way of this confession.

idiosyncratic messages they generate in response to externally produced messages." *Persuasion and Human Action* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982), 218.

¹³² *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950), 291–401. James's discussion of the self is much more complex than my rough outline here, and the distinction has been challenged and expanded on in subsequent theorizing about the self. Cf. Richard Ashmore and Lee Jussim, eds., *Self and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹³³ Kevin W. Hector, *The Theological Project of Modernism: Faith and the Conditions of Mineness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

The truth about one's self, and the passion with which one reaches out to God and loves one's neighbor, cannot be given from one person to another. Rather, these exist within each person as glowing embers. A critic who wants to help stoke these embers into a flame can at most help create the conditions in which what is already within the interlocutor can be more fully realized and expressed.¹³⁴ The essential truths, then, cannot be communicated directly, but can be maieutically brought out through indirect communication, which makes the reader active, sets the reader free, and encourages self-discovery.

In conclusion, in this chapter we have discussed how Kierkegaard uses ICC to develop an approach to Christian communication. In order to pursue his rhetorical goal—to introduce Christianity into Christendom—Kierkegaard takes into consideration the situation, the illusions of his interlocutors, and the concerned nature of Christian truth. He points out the many ways one can communicate a Christian (or “Christian”) message in a self-betraying way, unwittingly transforming the essentially Christian into something it is not. He does not constrain Christian communication by prescriptive-procedural communicative rules, nor does he pursue a realist approach and deploy all of the various persuasive tactics at his disposal. The norms that guide his communicative practice are taken directly from his rhetorical goals.

Even if they do not share his goals, contemporary communicators can learn a great deal from Kierkegaard's reflections on how to challenge illusions without misleading or unnecessarily antagonizing his interlocutors. We will return to Kierkegaard's practical suggestions in chapter 6. In the next chapter, we will analyze in greater depth the relation between means and ends in the tradition of nonviolent direct action.

¹³⁴ This is what Kierkegaard means by “upbuilding” as opposed to “teaching.” See *Works of Love*, 209–24, 274–80. Cf. *Journals and Papers*, 1:508, 1:641, 2:1251.

5. “Dynamically Aggressive”: The Rhetorical Force of Nonviolent Direct Action

“Every act we perform today must reflect the kind of human relationships we are fighting to establish tomorrow.”¹ – David Dellinger

To summarize the dissertation so far, in chapter 1 I surveyed the three dominant voices in the ethics of communication. Each of these voices asks a different primary question of a symbolic action for social change.² Civility asks, “Is its moral?” Victory asks, “Is it effective?” Open-mindedness asks, “Is it nonviolent?” Of course, many people ask more than one of these questions, so these voices are found not only in public discussions but also in internal deliberation. Each of these three voices has shortcomings that prevent it from serving satisfactorily as a cross-contextual communication ethic. Many people thus have a de facto communication ethic that switches back and forth between these standpoints, often resulting in self-deception. As I argued in chapter 2, sincerely held moral norms can fail to constrain immoral action because—among other reasons—people will justify breaking these norms for the sake of ends they deem ethically overriding. The psychological dynamics of social conflict make this especially easy to do. In chapter 3, I suggested that one way to address this problem is to look to individuals’ and groups’ ends as a source of normative guidelines for which means they should employ.³ One way of doing this is what I call integral communication criticism. In ICC, the principal question asked of a candidate symbolic action is, “In a particular situation, what

¹ *Revolutionary Nonviolence: Essays by Dave Dellinger* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 20.

² By “symbolic action,” here as elsewhere, I include all texts, statements, actions, and courses of action that have a communicative dimension.

³ This is one way to address the problem, which is not to say that it could ever suffice to solve the problem. As mentioned at the end of chapter 2, the approach outlined in this dissertation is meant to complement ongoing work in virtue ethics, the ethics of care, moral imagination, and other approaches that ask ethical questions outside the boxes of “what moral rules ought we to follow?” and “what ethical ends ought we pursue?”

implicit messages does the means one uses convey, and is conveying those messages conducive to the ends one seeks?”

In chapters 3 and 4, I analyzed how three authors (Freire, Campbell, and Kierkegaard) rely on ICC to guide their symbolic action for social change. Though these authors pursue different ends in different situations, each of them argues that more direct, monological forms of communication alone are ill-suited to bring about the change they seek. These forms of communication express a message at cross-purposes with the kinds of realization and transformation the authors hope to effect (respectively, the participatory liberation of the oppressed, women’s cultivation of non-hierarchical experience-sharing, and the reintroduction of Christianity into Christendom). While direct, monological communication is well-suited to many communicative goals, these authors conclude that it is not sufficient for their purposes and may be counter-productive—in the terms of this dissertation, self-betraying communication.

These three examples have illustrated ICC in practice and shown how ICC weaves together the questions “Is it moral?” and “Is it effective?” ICC, that is, shares with Civility a concern for integrity while also having close affinities with the practical reasoning characteristic of Victory. In this chapter, I continue this discussion and incorporate the third question, “Is it nonviolent?” I use ICC to analyze the tradition of nonviolent direct action exemplified in the writings, speeches, and actions of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. From this tradition, I argue, we can discern a nonviolent approach to communication that does not have the shortcomings Open-mindedness has.⁴

⁴ See chapter 1 for the eight objections I make to the Open-mindedness standpoint.

“I believe that for *practical as well as moral* reasons,” King writes, “nonviolence offers the only road to freedom for my people.”⁵ In this chapter, I analyze the arguments King and his fellow nonviolent theorist-practitioners make for this conclusion, drawing special attention to the role of communication in this reasoning. One of the goals of this chapter, then, is to describe an approach to symbolic action that is simultaneously attentive to the concerns of morality, effectiveness, and nonviolence—addressing the concerns that motivate the Civility, Victory, and Open-mindedness perspectives while operating under a different ethical logic from all three. Interestingly enough, representatives of the Civility, Victory, and Open-mindedness perspectives all cite Gandhi and King as exemplars.⁶ But, as I will argue, Gandhi and King articulate their own approach to symbolic action through reasoning closer to ICC than to the prescriptive proceduralism of Civility, the instrumentalism of Victory, or the non-interference logic of Open-mindedness. All three viewpoints recognize something valuable in Gandhi and King, but none of them do justice to the communication ethic of these figures.

The main task of this chapter is to offer a plausible reconstruction of Gandhi’s and King’s reasoning for nonviolent direct action that focuses on the communicative dimension. Both authors believe that nonviolent direct action is more moral and more effective than violence as a means of bringing about the social change they seek. Throughout their writings, they offer fragments of arguments for this conclusion, but it takes interpretive work to weave these together into a coherent philosophical case for the effectiveness of nonviolence. I argue that ICC offers a plausible way to make sense of many of various claims these authors—and many of their

⁵ *A Testament of Hope*, 55. Emphasis mine.

⁶ See Carter, *Civility*, 29–30; Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 37–45. The introduction to Rosenberg’s *Nonviolent Communication* was written by Gandhi’s grandson Arun Gandhi, who draws connections between his grandfather’s ideas and NVC.

colleagues, interpreters, and disciples—make, and that Barbara Deming’s case for nonviolence serves as valuable reference point in this undertaking.

The further argument of this chapter is that paying attention to communication can help us answer questions about nonviolence, and vice versa. Attending to the communicative dimension of symbolic action helps us understand the idea, reiterated by nonviolent activists, that means and ends are integrally related. Attending to arguments for nonviolent direct action helps us reflect on the ethics of symbolic action for social change. The theorist-practitioners featured in this chapter argue that symbolic actions that convey good will toward opponents and (as much as possible) enact the values activists are championing will, in the long run, be more effective in bringing about the desired social change than hostile, dismissive, or antagonistic symbolic actions. Discussing their arguments, I maintain, provides a way to think about communication ethics beyond the limitations of prescriptive proceduralism.⁷

This chapter is similar in form to the previous treatments of Freire, Campbell, and Kierkegaard, but instead of focusing on a particular author, it focuses on a particular thread within the nonviolent direct action tradition.⁸ To the degree that readers share commitments to the ends these authors strive for and/or the means they use to pursue them, readers can reason analogically from this chapter’s discussion to their own rhetorical situations. Millions around the world have been captivated by the visions of a better world expressed by Gandhi and King, so analyzing their arguments for which means are most conducive to those ends has more direct applicability than Kierkegaard’s more idiosyncratic meditations.

⁷ On prescriptive proceduralism, see chapters 1 and 2.

⁸ This is not the only thread within that tradition. In arguing that these authors use ICC or can be plausibly interpreted that way, I am not claiming they did so consistently or to the exclusion of other forms of ethical and strategic reasoning.

Though I find Gandhi's, King's, and Deming's arguments that nonviolent direct action is more effective than violence compelling and worthy of further consideration, it would be beyond the purview of this chapter to go into any depth studying the historical record and deciding whether and in which situations violence can bring about positive social change.⁹ This chapter attends rather to the *shape* of the reconstructed argument for nonviolent direct action: how concerns for morality, effectiveness, and nonviolence are woven together in this tradition and how ICC helps us make sense of this interweaving. These authors do not—*pace* Alinsky's reading—opt for nonviolence solely for strategic reasons, nor do they choose nonviolence out of obedience to moral principle without any practical considerations.¹⁰ Their reasoning is more complex and fascinating, and it is worth studying their case for nonviolent direct action even if objections can be made to some of their more strident claims.

Furthermore, as discussed in the first two chapters, moral criticisms of symbolic action are often dismissed because the critics are seen as external to the conflict or as more concerned with preserving their own moral purity than bringing about change. As Brené Brown says, “If you aren't in the arena also getting your ass kicked, I'm not interested in your feedback.”¹¹ Gandhi, King, and the other theorist-practitioners discussed in this chapter were on the front lines, as it were, of social conflicts, and their reasoning is pragmatic and realistic. They maintained that the most practical way to achieve social change involves treating one's

⁹ This question has received significant attention among scholars of the civil rights era, with many arguing that more militant groups' actions aided the cause of King and the SCLC. See, for instance, Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954–1970* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995). One possible interpretation, using King's categories, is that riots and threats helped bring about the proximate ends of safety and legislative victories, but were not necessarily conducive to the ultimate ends of integration and the Beloved Community. I discuss this distinction later in the chapter.

¹⁰ Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 37–45.

¹¹ “Brené Brown: Why Your Critics Aren't the Ones Who Count,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-JXOnFOXQk>.

opponents with respect and compassion while simultaneously resisting the injustices even to the point of personal sacrifice. One can disagree with their reasoning, of course, but it cannot be summarily dismissed as the moralizing remarks of detached columnists more interested in keeping their hands clean than making the world a better place.

Though the nonviolent direct actions discussed in this chapter are for the most part group protests, Gandhi and King insist that nonviolence extends beyond these organized events. “I plan to stand by nonviolence,” King writes, “because I have found it to be a philosophy of life that regulates not only my dealings in the struggle for justice but also my dealings with people, with my own self.”¹² He writes elsewhere that nonviolence is applicable “in every field of conflict.”¹³ Nonviolent direct action offers insights not only into how one should conduct oneself in marches and sit-ins, but also in conversations, debates, and social media posts. Throughout this chapter, I will suggest a few insights that can be gained for communication ethics from this analysis of nonviolent direct action, and in chapter 6 I will discuss in greater depth how the arguments of this chapter contribute to a cross-contextual Christian communication ethic.

Before reconstructing Gandhi’s and King’s argument, I should define what I mean by “nonviolent direct action.” It is an umbrella term that encompasses a broad range of activities, and the different theorist-practitioners analyzed in this chapter have differences and disagreements that for the most part I do not discuss. Ron Sider offers a helpful, but contentious, definition: “By ‘nonviolent action’ I mean an activist confrontation with evil that respects the personhood even of the ‘enemy’ and therefore seeks both to end the oppression and to reconcile

¹² *A Testament of Hope*, 69.

¹³ *A Testament of Hope*, 628. Gandhi likewise writes, “Satyagraha is a law of universal application. Beginning with the family its use can be extended to every other circle.” *Non-violent Resistance*, 382; cf. 155.

the oppressor through nonviolent methods.”¹⁴ Specifying that the confrontation is with “evil” has the advantage of acknowledging the non-antagonistic component of the philosophy of nonviolence. The struggle, Gandhi and King reiterate, is not against people but against the injustice that keeps people divided and oppressed. Specifying that the confrontation is with “evil,” however, ignores the fact that sometimes nonviolent campaigns can be carried out in error. Gandhi argued that this was a strength of nonviolence—nonviolent campaigns surface rather than submerge the question of whether the activists are in the right, thus making it possible for activists to recognize when they are in the wrong and call off direct actions. Modifying Sider’s definition, we might say that nonviolent direct action confronts a policy, ruling, ideology, or social reality a group *takes to be* evil or unjust.

In order to be “nonviolent,” an action or movement must have as its minimum requirement the disavowal of lethal force. But as Sider’s definition suggests, the nonviolent direct action tradition goes further than this, involving a recognition of the personhood of all parties involved and an active concern for the well-being of all, including the people who currently oppose the activists’ cause.¹⁵ Ronald Arnett writes, “the main tenet of nonviolent action is to act in a way that the needs of both parties are met at least somewhat adequately in a non-win/lose situation.”¹⁶ Hence, though it has become the standard term for the movement discussed in this chapter, “nonviolence” is too weak a word. The driving concern of nonviolent direct action is not merely to eschew violence but actively to pursue a social order responsive to the needs of everyone involved. To underline this positive, constructive, dynamic aspect, Gandhi

¹⁴ Ronald J. Sider, *Nonviolent Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), xv.

¹⁵ In this chapter, I will use “activists,” “opponents,” and “onlookers” to refer, respectively, to those who are acting to bring about a certain social change, those who oppose or impede the activists’ efforts, and those who are not strongly committed either way. I will use “injustice” as a catch-all term to refer to the oppression, militarism, immoral policies, structural inequality, and totalitarianism that activists are striving to eliminate.

¹⁶ *Dwell in Peace: Applying Nonviolence to Everyday Relationships* (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1980), 126.

named his method *satyagraha* and King sometimes used the language of “soul force.” In this chapter, when I use the terms “nonviolent direct action,” “nonviolent resistance,” or “nonviolence,” I am referring to this fuller understanding, the details of which will become clearer as the chapter goes on.

I. Means and Ends Revisited

As discussed in chapter 3, a key principle of Gandhi’s and King’s nonviolent ethic is the integral connection between means and ends. King summarizes this principle, “This movement is based on the philosophy that ends and means must cohere... Immoral or destructive means cannot bring about moral and constructive ends.”¹⁷ Gandhi likewise writes, “As the means, so the end,”¹⁸ and adds, “I can say with confidence that if the world is to have peace, nonviolence is the means to that end and [there is] no other.”¹⁹ This idea is found throughout the writings of these two authors, as well as their many interpreters and inheritors.

Curiously, however, few efforts are made to provide any rationale for this principle, and readers look in vain for arguments designed to convince skeptical readers. The prevailing tendency in the secondary literature on Gandhi and King is to mention the connection between means and ends, provide a few quotations to show they believed it, and then offer little to no discussion of why they believed it or on what grounds it could be justified.²⁰ It is a principle that

¹⁷ *A Testament of Hope*, 45.

¹⁸ Mohandas Gandhi, *The Essential Gandhi*, ed. Louis Fischer (New York: Random House, 2002), 174.

¹⁹ Quoted in Michael Nagler, *The Search for a Nonviolent Future* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2002), 201. The quotation comes from Gandhi’s journal *Harijan*, July 20, 1947.

²⁰ See, for example, John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King Jr.: Nonviolent Strategies and Tactics for Social Change* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 2000), 185; Robert Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense: A Gandhian Approach* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 109–110; April Carter, “Nonviolence as a Strategy for Change,” in *Reader in Peace Studies*, eds. Paul Smoker, Ruth Davies, and Barbara Munske (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1990), 214; David Cortright, *Gandhi and Beyond: Nonviolence for an Age of Terrorism* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 17–18; S.K. Kim, *The Philosophical Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Dehli: Vikas Publishing House, 1996), 251–252; Arne Naess, *Gandhi and Group Conflict* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1974), 62–64; Johan Galtung and Dietrich Fischer, *Johan Galtung: Pioneer of Peace Research* (Berlin: Springer, 2013), 57;

seems self-evidently true to some, and self-evidently ludicrous to others. In this section, I will argue for a weak version of the idea that there is an integral connection between means and ends. This will develop and expand the short treatment of ICC in the beginning of chapter 3. My goal is not necessarily to explain why Gandhi and King believe in this principle, but to give an argument in favor of this principle that draws on their work as well as the writings of other nonviolent activists, principally Barbara Deming.

The principle of an integral relationship between means and ends is not simply a rhetorical flourish in the speeches and writings of Gandhi and King. In the years since their deaths, Gandhi and King have both been quoted *ad nauseum*, and it can be easy to take their sentences as isolated aphorisms designed more to inspire than to teach. One of the purposes of this chapter is to show that quotations like King’s “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that”²¹ are, for King, not just poetic sentiments but part of a pragmatic assessment of how best to address injustice. For King,

Nagler, *The Search for a Nonviolent Future*, 283; Michael J. Nojeim, *Gandhi and King* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 13; Joseph Prabhu, “Gandhi’s Religious Ethics,” in Douglas Allen, ed., *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi for the Twenty-first Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 171; Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998), 146. Douglas Allen draws a connection between Gandhi’s views on means and ends and Buddhist philosophy in “Mahatma Gandhi’s Philosophy of Violence, Nonviolence, and Education” in *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi for the Twenty-first Century*, 46–51. Two exceptions come to mind: the sixth chapter of Joan Bondurant’s classic *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Violence* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1965), and Raghavan Iyer’s *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 360–370. Though he does not connect it explicitly with the means-ends relation, Stellan Vinthagen’s discussion of “symbolic effectiveness” offers an account similar to what I propose here; see *A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 82–131.

²¹ *A Testament of Hope*, 594. The same can be said for many of King’s other well-known quotations such as “Violence solves no social problems; it merely creates new and more complicated ones.” *A Testament of Hope*, 7. The familiarity of these and other quotations—circulated routinely on Martin Luther King Day—testifies to their hold over American moral imagination but should not lead us to conclude that many Americans are grappling with the putative truth of these statements. By treating King as a saint and an inspiration, we can ironically neglect to take seriously the more radical and practical aspects of his teachings. Cornel West calls this “the Santa-Clausification of Martin Luther King Jr.” Quoted in Jason Springs, *Healthy Conflict in Contemporary American Society* (Oxford: Oxford, 2018), 105. Cf. Vincent Harding’s *Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996). In this chapter, I treat King and Gandhi as authorities on nonviolent direct action, while trying to, as it were, keep their feet on the ground.

this statement expresses a contestable claim, is part of a comprehensive moral vision, and can serve as a practical guideline for real-world social action.

To that end, it is worth quoting King at length:

Now let me say, secondly, that if we are to have peace in the world, men and nations must embrace the nonviolent affirmation that ends and means must cohere. One of the great philosophical debates of history has been over the whole question of means and ends. And there have always been those who argued that the end justifies the means, that the means really aren't important. The important thing is to get to the end, you see.

So, if you're seeking to develop a just society, they say, the important thing is to get there, and the means are really unimportant; any means will do so long as they get you there. They may be violent, they may be untruthful means; they may even be unjust means to a just end. There have been those who have argued this throughout history. But we will never have peace in the world until men everywhere recognize that ends are not cut off from means, because the means represent the ideal in the making, and the end in process, and ultimately you can't reach good ends through evil means, because the means represent the seed and the end represents the tree.

It's one of the strangest things that all the great military geniuses of the world have talked about peace. The conquerors of old who came killing in pursuit of peace, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, and Napoleon, were akin in seeking a peaceful world order. If you will read *Mein Kampf* closely enough, you will discover that Hitler contended that everything he did in Germany was for peace. And the leaders of the world today talk eloquently about peace. Every time we drop our bombs in North Vietnam, President Johnson talks eloquently about peace. What is the problem? They are talking about peace as a distant goal, as an end we seek, but one day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal we seek, but that it is a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means. All of this is saying that, in the final analysis, means and ends must cohere because the end is preexistent in the means, and ultimately destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends.²²

In this passage, King treats the means-ends principle as a legitimate contender in “one of the great philosophical debates,” an idea that is true “in the final analysis,” and an insight that sheds light on spirals of violence found from the ancient world to the present. Gandhi is, if anything,

²² *A Testament of Hope*, 254–255; cf. 6–10, 45, 102, 214, 627.

even more matter-of-fact in his account of the principle.²³ Though Gandhi does engage in spiritual reflection, he reiterates that his commitment to nonviolent means is thoroughly practical and his assessment of it is based in observation and experimentation more than mystical faith.²⁴ Both authors treat the means-ends principle as a legitimate theory with explanatory power that can be used to interpret history and guide practical action. That is, then, how I will treat it in this chapter.

I distinguish between the strong version of this principle and the weak version. The strong version is the idea that violence begets violence and that, as a law of history, violent social movements cannot bring about a peaceful society. Some advocates of nonviolence have argued the strong version, and cited as evidence promising revolutionary movements that became repressive through increasing reliance on violence to achieve their initially noble ends.²⁵ There

²³ Gandhi, *Non-violent Resistance*, 9–15. This is Gandhi’s most sustained argument for the means-ends connection, and it has four components. First, analogies: Gandhi writes that the idea of securing peace through violence “is the same as saying that we can get a rose through planting a noxious weed.” Second, historical examples: Gandhi writes, “The English in 1833 [actually 1832] obtained greater voting power through violence,” but in this process did not become more independent (cf. 114). Third, narratives: Gandhi discusses an imaginary scenario of a robber threatening a homeowner and either being provoked by violence or won over by compassion. Fourth, and most interestingly, Gandhi argues that the means one uses to acquire a thing alter the status of that thing. If I steal your watch, it becomes stolen property; if I buy it from you, it becomes my property; and if I ask you for it, it becomes a gift. All four components are suggestive, but subject to many objections and in need of further elaboration and defense, which Gandhi does not provide.

²⁴ Robert Burrowes writes, “While Gandhi was deeply concerned with the spiritual, religious, and ethical aspects of nonviolence, in his view, it is still ‘the most practical politics.’ In fact, he asserted, ‘if any action of mine claimed to be spiritual is proved to be unpractical it must be pronounced a failure. I do believe the most spiritual act is the most practical in the true sense of the term.’ ‘Satyagraha is, as a matter of fact and in the long run, the most expedient course.’ According to Gandhi, then, there is no conflict between ethical and practical politics.” *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense*, 113, quoting Gandhi in *Young India* and *Harijan*. I am not ruling out the possibility that Gandhi or King believed in a mystical continuity between means and ends, rooted in a karmic metaphysics or theological faith. I am arguing rather that one does not need to believe in any such connection in order to understand their reasoning for using nonviolent means to create a nonviolent society.

²⁵ For one example, Nigel Young writes, “The previous history and methods of every revolutionary movement are mirrored in the end product, the new social order. Whether we look at Bolshevik Russia, Zionist Israel, or Castro’s Cuba the circumstances which surround the new regimes determine their subsequent actions; no revolutionary power structure has yet been able to transcend the specific constellation of necessities which conditioned its development. These developments focus on the coercive apparatus of state power. To seize the apparatus of armed forces, secret police, bureaucrats, etc., a countermonopoly of violence is needed. Thus in such ‘liberation’ the waystation to a dispersal of power becomes the concentration of more power; the waystation to internationalism becomes national consolidation; the means to an abolition of violence is the use of even more violence, etc. The means used, far from being compatible with the ends sought, become the exact opposite. No wonder that ostensibly

are, however, apparent counter-examples throughout history. To properly evaluate this claim would require a massive study of history that is well beyond the scope of this chapter.²⁶ The weak version, which I defend here, is that the use of violent means conveys an implicit message to opponents, other activists, onlookers, and oneself, and expressing this message is counterproductive to realizing the vision of a more peaceable, compassionate society which many activists hope for. I argue that the phenomenon of self-betraying communication helps us understand why well-intentioned efforts to achieve social change by justifiable violence are likely to be counter-productive to activists' long-term goals.²⁷ Violence may be a viable means of achieving proximate ends like the passage of a law, but violence is ill-suited to bring about ultimate ends like a more compassionate, equitable, independent society. Gandhi, King, and those who follow in their footsteps embrace nonviolence as a tool for social change not out of naïve optimism or obedience to impractical moral rules, but out of an understanding—even if implicit—of the communicative dimension of social conflict and the power of integral communication.

II. Two-Handed Communication

'socialist' or utopian movements become brutalized and degenerate." In "Nonviolence and Social Change," in *A Reader in Peace Studies*, 217–18. A.J. Muste similarly adheres to the strong version; see *The Essays of A.J. Muste* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), 137, 184, 271, 330, and *Nonviolence in an Aggressive World* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1940), chapter 6. It is not clear whether or to what degree Gandhi and King believed in the strong version. King writes, "I'd be the first to say that some historical victories have been won by violence; the U.S. Revolution is certainly one of the foremost," and then goes on to make relevant distinctions. *A Testament of Hope*, 365. Gandhi says cryptically, "Often does good come out of evil. But that is God's, not man's plan. Man knows that only evil can come out of evil, as good out of good." Quoted in Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man, His People, and the Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 519.

²⁶ Social-scientific efforts toward evaluating this claim have been made. See, for instance, Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) and Adrian Karatnycky and Peter Ackerman, *How Freedom Is Won: From Civic Resistance to Durable Democracy* (New York: Freedom House, 2005).

²⁷ Gandhi insists that "violence on our part will harm the struggle and retard its progress. Two opposite forces can never work concurrently so as to help each other." *Non-violent Resistance*, 240, cf. 351. This reasoning is close to my argument about "mixed messages" expressed in self-betraying communication, as discussed in chapter 3.

To understand the role of communication in nonviolent direct action, we will turn to the work of Barbara Deming. Deming was a key figure in the American antiwar movement as well as protest movements for racial and gender justice in the 1960s and 1970s. Though not widely known today, her essays, poetry, and activism inspired a generation.²⁸ In her landmark essay “Revolution and Equilibrium” and her other works, she gives what remains the clearest argument for why nonviolent direct action for justice can be an effective method of social change. Most of the points Deming makes will be echoed by other theorist-practitioners of nonviolence that we will discuss later in the chapter, but Deming’s argument offers a helpful introduction to thinking about nonviolent direct action through a communicative lens.

After describing the importance of showing compassion to opponents, Deming writes,

But I can imagine the impatience of some of my readers with these various scruples. What, they might say, has this to do with fighting battles—battles which are in dead earnest? How can we hope to put any real pressure upon an adversary for whom we show such concern?

This is the heart of my argument: We can put *more* pressure on the antagonist for whom we show human concern.²⁹

This is counter-intuitive, but Deming makes a compelling case. The particular strength of nonviolence is that it puts two pressures on the opponent, pressures which Deming argues “are

²⁸ See Pam McAllister, ed., *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982). More recently, David Cortright writes, “Deming deserves to be better known that she is today. She transformed and modernized the Gandhian method by developing a systematic argument for nonviolent action that rested entirely on pragmatic rather than religious foundations. She stretched the limits of nonviolence to mold it into a militant and revolutionary form of social change.” *Gandhi and Beyond*, 117–118. While I would dispute the dichotomy between “pragmatic” and “religious,” this is a fair and instructive assessment of Deming’s contribution. Ira Chernus writes that Deming is “probably the least well known of all the great theorists of nonviolence in U.S. History.” *American Nonviolence: The History of an Idea* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 2004), 182. Deming’s biography can be found in Martin Duberman, *A Saving Remnant: The Radical Lives of Barbara Deming and David McRoberts* (New York: The New Press, 2011).

²⁹ *We Are All Part of One Another: A Barbara Deming Reader*, ed. Jane Meyerding, 177.

particularly effective in combination.”³⁰ The first pressure is the pressure of *resistance* to the injustice, of refusal to cooperate in an unjust system and refusal to silently acquiesce to injustice. The second pressure is *respect*, “human concern” for all people, including the opponents (those who are directly or indirectly responsible for this injustice).

Deming writes,

I have spoken of a combination of pressures. And this is crucial in defining the power of nonviolence. Noncooperation, disruption, can be violent or nonviolent. When it is nonviolent I believe it is immensely more powerful in the long run. Because one has then, as it were, two hands upon the adversary. With one hand one shakes up his life drastically, makes it impossible for him simply to continue as he has been. With the other hand we calm him, we control his response to us. Because we respect his rights as well as ours, his real, his human rights—because we reassure him that it is not his destruction that we want, merely justice—we keep him from responding to our actions as men respond to violence, mechanically, blindly. We force him to think—to ask all kinds of questions of himself, about the nature of our actions and our grievance, about the real issues involved, about what others watching the struggle will think, about where his own real long-term interests lie—whether they don’t lie in adjusting himself to change.³¹

We can unpack this argument by borrowing from Kierkegaard the notion of illusions. If the activist relies exclusively on respect and not resistance, it can feed the illusion that everything is well and good, and that the *status quo* can continue without interference. If the activist relies exclusively on resistance and not on respect, it can feed the illusion that the parties involved are in a zero-sum power struggle and that the opponent needs to use force to defend themselves and

³⁰ Barbara Deming, *Revolution and Equilibrium*, 223. For the purposes of this chapter, we will use “opponent” to refer to those who are directly or indirectly responsible for the injustice which an activist group is trying to rectify. The language of “opponent” has its drawbacks, as will become hopefully evident throughout this chapter.

³¹ *Revolution and Equilibrium*, 223–24; cf. Barbara Deming, *Prisons that Could Not Hold* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 71–73; cf. *We Are All Part of One Another*, 175–80, 200–3; cf. Barbara Deming, *We Cannot Live without Our Lives*, 8–11. On Deming’s “two hands” argument, see Pam McAllister, “Introduction,” in *Reweaving the Web of Life*, ed. Pam McAllister, iii–iv; Dellinger, 286; Ira Chernus, *American Nonviolence: The History of an Idea*, 190; David Cortright, *Gandhi and Beyond*, 126–28; Stellan Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action*, 48–49, 252–54.

maintain the goods of security and order. This latter point is what Deming means by “we control his response to us,” namely that the nonviolent activists limit the range of responses the opponent can justify.³² While it is possible for opponents to resort to repressive means to silence nonviolent activists, in the clear absence of a threat the opponent feels less of a need to do so and is, in fact, disincentivized from doing so.

This is the first advantage of nonviolent direct action: it is less likely than violent demonstrations to provoke repressive reactions. While it may seem more dangerous since the nonviolent activists are not armed, in the long run it actually leads to fewer casualties for one’s own group and overall. By respecting the needs and concerns of the opponent in their words and actions, nonviolent activists make it less likely for the opponent to lash out defensively.

In addition to reducing the long-term likelihood of escalation and repressive reactions, the “two hands” approach of nonviolent direct action also has the advantage of keeping the central issue in focus. “Because the human rights of the adversary are respected, though his actions, his official policies are not,” Deming writes, “the focus of attention becomes those actions, those policies, and their true nature. The issue cannot be avoided. The antagonist cannot take the interference with his actions personally, because his person is not threatened, and he is forced to begin to acknowledge the reality of the grievance against him.”³³ We will discuss this

³² Deming writes, “People who attack others need rationalizations for doing so. We undermine those rationalizations.” *We Cannot Live without Our Lives*, 11. Though here and elsewhere she uses language of “control,” I think Deming would concede this is too strong of a word. She recognizes that opponents can resort to disproportionate means to suppress resistance. She writes, “Nonviolence is not a magic spell that one can cast over the antagonist—the psychological equivalent of one of the new paralyzing drugs. One of its functions is to minimize—in the long run—the violence an antagonist will feel justified in using; but it can hardly be expected to prevent retaliation altogether.” *Revolution and Equilibrium*, 229; cf. Deming, *We Are All Part of One Another*, 169; *Prisons that Could Not Hold*, 76–77.

³³ *We Are All Part of One Another*, 178. Cf. “The more the real issues are dramatized, and the struggle raised above the personal, the more control those in nonviolent rebellion begin to gain over their adversary. For they are able at one and the same time to disrupt everything for him, making it impossible for him to operate within the system as

point at greater length below, but a central tenet of nonviolent direct action is a distinction between persons and policies. By consistently respecting opponents as persons while resisting their policies, nonviolent activists make it easier for opponents and third parties to distinguish between persons and policies and to evaluate whether the policies in question are just, regardless of the status of the persons involved.

The third advantage of nonviolent direct action is that the resist-and-respect combination allows activists to motivate action without resorting to an overly simplistic, black-and-white framing of the issue and the people involved. As we discussed in chapter 2, terrible injustices can be perpetrated by otherwise moral, thoughtful people. Unjust systems and spirals of violence cause more suffering than malicious individuals do. In social conflict, seldom can lines be clearly drawn between the “good guys” and the “bad guys,” especially when the injustices in question are woven into the fabric of society. In this situation, one is faced with a choice between becoming a both-sides, who’s-to-say, it’s-all-shades-of-gray sideline commentator, on the one hand, or sacrificing nuance and accuracy for the sake of motivating action, on the other. Truth is the first casualty of war, as Hiram Johnson famously observed, and the same can often be said about militant social movements. By contrast, the two-handed, dynamic character of nonviolent direct action allows activists to hold on to complex truths. Deming writes, “If the complicated truth is that many of the oppressed are also oppressors and many of the oppressors are also oppressed, nonviolent confrontation is the only form of confrontation that allows us to respond realistically to such complexity. In this kind of struggle we address ourselves always both to that which we refuse to accept from others and to that which we can respect in them, have in

usual, and to temper his response to this, making it impossible for him simply to strike back without thought and with all his strength.” *We Are All Part of One Another*, 178. Cf. *Revolution and Equilibrium*, 224–25.

common with them—however much or little that may be.”³⁴ Nonviolent direct action campaigns allow participants to invest their full selves in the pursuit of change without self-deceptively oversimplifying the issue or relying on stereotypes and half-truths.

The distinctive power of nonviolence, according to Deming, rests in its combination of resistance and respect, of disruption and compassion. “We count,” she writes, “on the special effect that can be achieved when two pressures—of friendliness and disobedience—are exerted simultaneously. It was important to keep the two in balance. The more uncooperative we are, the more care we have to take to communicate friendliness too.”³⁵ By the same token, friendliness must be balanced by criticism; Deming writes, “People may find it more comfortable to listen to us if we equivocate, but in the long run only words that discomfit them are going to change our situation.”³⁶ Through this combination of civil disobedience with “friendliness,” nonviolent activists communicate “that we want no victory in the usual sense—are not concerned to see how much punishment we can deal out.”³⁷ Here we see Deming using ICC to make an argument for nonviolent direct action in the pursuit of justice. Violent and disrespectful actions, Deming argues, would be self-betraying communication if one’s goal is to secure human rights for all people. One does not show respect for the opponent out of ignorance about the severity of the injustice opponents are responsible for. Nor does Deming argue that “respect your opponents” is a transcendent moral prescription. Rather, Deming argues activists should convey respect to their opponents because activists’ goal is a *more just social order*. As she writes, “Vengeance isn’t the

³⁴ *We Are All Part of One Another*, 289. Cf. 271. Deming’s friend and collaborator Jane Meyerding argues that nonviolence is essential for feminism because of “the unique ability of nonviolence to simultaneously accept and reject—to acknowledge and connect with that which is valuable in a person at the same time as it resists and challenges that person’s oppressive attitudes or behavior.” In *Reweaving the Web of Life*, 10.

³⁵ Deming, quoted in Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 72–73.

³⁶ *We Are All Part of One Another*, 108.

³⁷ Deming, quoted in Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 73.

point; change is.”³⁸ Nonviolent direct action, by using means that communicate that vengeance is not the point, makes it easier for all parties involved to focus on creating social change, which is the desired end.

For Deming, nonviolent direct action is expressive of the vision of reality its practitioners hope to bring about.³⁹ By treating all parties involved with respect, activists show what social life ought to be like.⁴⁰ The message that all people have rights and value is expressed in and through the actions nonviolent activists take. This integral communication helps dispel some of the illusions already present in a society (e.g., that the status quo is just, that some people are entitled to more rights than others, that progress will just come automatically) as well as some of the illusions that spring up around social movements (e.g., that the social order they strive for will exclude or even harm innocent people, that the activists have ulterior motives, that the struggle for rights is zero-sum).

Deming explicitly argues for this in communicative terms, writing, “Those of us who act must always be saying with the actions that we take two things—*and always saying these two things at the same time.*” First, with words and actions, activists need to convey the message, “The machinery of things-as-they-are is a machinery of death, and we are going to so disrupt it that it will not be able to keep functioning as it has been.” Deming continues,

But even as we give that shock, we must be communicating something else, too—again, not merely with words but above all by our actions. We must be saying: Don’t be afraid of *us*. It is the system we are attacking that you need to fear—that all of us need to fear. For it is reckless with lives. *But we are not*. Don’t fear us.

³⁸ *We Are All Part of One Another*, 179.

³⁹ We will complicate this point later in this chapter when we discuss Joan Bondurant’s idea of the “Gandhian dialectic.”

⁴⁰ “If justice means anything,” Deming writes, “it means that those who have been opposing us will have rights too... refusal to hit back at any opponent or lie to him or trick him can inhibit him in his resort to vengeance, break the familiar circuit of vengeance and counter-vengeance.” Quoted in Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 73.

What we seek is precisely a new community of men in which we are all careful of each other—and of the natural world around us. And look, we are beginning to build that new world right now—in our relations with each other, in our relations even with you. *Don't be afraid of us. We are trying to release men from fear.*⁴¹

Deming argues that nonviolent direct action's strength lies in its ability to convey these two messages simultaneously and in a way that different audiences—opponents, onlookers, and activists themselves—can hear, minimizing the effect of illusions as much as possible. It has the power to, in Campbell's terms, “violate the reality structure” of people who adhere to the myths that rationalize injustice and defend systems of oppression.

For *opponents*, Deming argues that the “two-handed” approach can have profound persuasive power. She writes,

We act out one truth they are quite ready to accept: the truth that *they* have certain fundamental human rights (try to act this out, let it show in our very bearing toward them, in every encounter that we have)—at the same time that we act out stubbornly our refusal to cooperate when they claim selfish privileges as though *these* were rights. They are accustomed to adversaries who seek to take from them everything. We seem to be taking from them with one hand, giving to them with another. This seeming paradox troubles their minds—throws them into a state of questioning, and therefore hesitation. Here is no actual paradox, of course. We are simply trying to act out—trying, in Gandhi's phrase, to cling to—the truth that not they alone but all people have rights; and the possibility of living together in a way that makes these rights secure, for all. Our struggle with them is to trouble their minds into recognizing just this possibility.⁴²

Both aspects of this approach, resistance and friendliness, are expressive of a single message: that all people have human rights and deserve to be treated with respect.⁴³ If this implicit

⁴¹ *We Are All Part of One Another*, 200–201. This emphasis on “shock” is close to Campbell's argument, discussed in chapter 3.

⁴² *We Cannot Live without Our Lives*, 10; cf. *We Are All Part of One Another*, 211; *Revolution and Equilibrium*, 98–99. Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel similarly argues that nonviolence is “more troublesome” than violence because it unsettles the conscience of those who would try to suppress it. *Christ in a Poncho* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 19.

⁴³ Deming, *We Cannot Live without Our Lives*, 8. She clarifies, “We assert the respect due ourselves, when it is denied, through noncooperation; we assert the respect due all others, through our refusal to be violent.” *We Cannot Live without Our Lives*, 211.

message is congruent with the activists' goals—as Deming believed it was for her campaigns for racial justice, feminism, economic justice, and global peace—then nonviolent direct action will strengthen the case activists are trying to make in their speeches, writings, marches, and acts of civil disobedience.

For *onlookers*, those who are neither currently opposed to the activists' goals nor actively supporting efforts to achieve them, nonviolent direct action can be similarly persuasive.⁴⁴ In protests against social injustice, widespread ignorance and misinformation are major hurdles that need to be overcome, often even more serious impediments to social change than direct opposition is. Violent demonstrations, though they may feel bolder than nonviolent demonstrations, do little to address these problems and often exacerbate them. Violent demonstrations do draw public attention to a social problem, but people typically pay more attention to the violence than the injustice it is supposed to surface. Even sympathetic onlookers typically condemn acts of violence and distance themselves from the movements that endorse them rather than coming to see the issue from the protesters' point of view.⁴⁵ In contrast to the slogan “force is the only language they understand,” Deming remarks that, in actuality, no one understands force.⁴⁶ She argues that even in situations where disruptive violence might be justifiable, it distracts from or obscures the issue for onlookers rather than bringing clarity and

⁴⁴ Deming, *Revolution and Equilibrium*, 255. David Cortright puts it well, summarizing Deming, “Even if some hearts are simply too cold and cannot be warmed even with the most loving and long-suffering appeals to conscience, nonviolence can still be effective. We don't have to win over the heart of every adversary. We can go over or around the opponent to win the sympathy of his or her allies and potential supporters. Even in the adversary remains absolutely unmoved personally, nonviolent action can appeal to the hearts of those on whom the exercise of power depends.” *Gandhi and Beyond*, 136.

⁴⁵ See Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), 600–601. Sharp's book, the longstanding authority in the field of nonviolent direct action, offers evidence and historical examples for several of the points made by Deming and others in this chapter.

⁴⁶ *Revolution and Equilibrium*, 62. Dellinger makes a similar argument in “Vietnam: A Television History; Homefront USA; Interview with David T. Dellinger, 1982,” August 31, 1982, WGBH Media Library & Archives, http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_25F744A5332949FC817D0B5A475098E5.

inviting participation.⁴⁷ When the goal is to get beyond the illusion that we need to use force to repress and control others, the use of force will be self-betraying. Deming writes, “Our task is to transform a society that deals out death into a new society that makes life more possible for all. To build such a new society, very many people are needed. So as we strike at the machinery of death, we have to do so in a way that the general population understands, that encourages more and more people to join us.”⁴⁸

Finally, nonviolent direct action also has an effect on those who engage in it, the *activists* themselves. For Deming, nonviolent direct action is, along with its other functions, a form of self-persuasion. A person’s symbolic actions shape their character and beliefs. Nonviolent direct action does not simply express the conviction that all people have rights, it *instills* and *reinforces* that conviction. By taking actions to embody a more just and compassionate social order, Deming argues, we become more fully convinced of the dignity of all people and that we do not need to rely on violence and exclusion to meet our needs.

This message, Deming argues, is not some radically new information, but a deeper realization of familiar truths, “the extraordinary faith announced in our Declaration of Independence: that all men are endowed with certain rights that must not be denied them... In short, the Christian faith, still revolutionary, that men are brothers and that—no matter what—our actions must respect the fact.” She adds, “The only mode of battle that does, implicitly,

⁴⁷ *We Are All Part of One Another*, 168–69.

⁴⁸ *We Are All Part of One Another*, 199. Deming’s friend and collaborator David Dellinger reiterates this point. Writing of his involvement in an antiwar protest at the Pentagon, he reflects, “If we are serious about the need for an American resistance, we must not cut ourselves off from the millions who are just beginning to oppose the war, the millions who are ambivalent and those who are prepared to dissent but not to rebel. On the steps of the Pentagon our cry to the soldiers was ‘Join us! Join us!’ This cry must be reflected both in the working out of our tactics and in the heat of actual confrontations.” *Revolutionary Nonviolence*, 292, cf. 272–73, 321–22, 328. Cf. Desmond Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God*, 164; Oscar Romero, *The Violence of Love* (Farmington, PA.: Plough Publishing House, 1998), 15.

respect this fact is that of nonviolence, and I have heard that for more and more of those in the civil rights as well as in the peace movement, the very attempt to practice it had implanted a corresponding faith, however tentative.”⁴⁹ Barbara Deming’s life stands as a testimony to how this revolutionary faith develops in and transforms those who practice nonviolence for social change. In the next section, we will study this revolutionary faith in greater depth, focusing on the ultimate ends sought by Gandhi and King and how these ends guided their reasoning about which means to employ.

III. The Beloved Community

To reiterate, integral communication criticism focuses on the ends communicators are trying to achieve and considers what implicit message is conveyed by the means they use to achieve those ends. In assessing this implicit message and whether or not expressing it is conducive to the communicator’s goals, the critic needs to pay attention to what Kierkegaard calls “the situation,” that is, the assumptions, prevailing beliefs, and concerns of the various audiences. In a specific situation and for a specific end, some symbolic actions may be self-betraying communication while others may be integral communication. One part of the situation is the illusions, which is to say the various falsehoods, half-truths, stereotypes, distorted frameworks, and misleading generalizations that impede persuasion and transformation. In some cases these illusions are tangentially related to communicators’ ends; in other cases communicators are specifically aiming to give the lie to these illusions.

⁴⁹ *We Are All Part of One Another*, 90. Despite her radical feminism, Deming insisted on keeping her original “generic male” language intact in early passages like this (see *We Are All Part of One Another*, ix). I do not use the “generic male” in this chapter, but I leave all quotations unchanged. The reference to “Christian faith” should not mislead; Deming’s biographer writes, “Barbara had long since rejected Christianity, while holding on... to her awe of Christ’s message—Christ the human being, not the ‘son of God.’” Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 225.

In order to be integral communication, the implicit message expressed by the communicators' symbolic actions does not need to be the *same* as the explicit messages the communicators voice, but rather that they be *compatible*, that “how” one communicates and “what” one communicates work together rather than at cross-purposes. As Deming argues, for example, *treating the opponent with respect* while simultaneously *condemning the injustices they permit* conveys two messages, but these two messages work in conjunction to change people's minds. The fact that these messages may not seem immediately compatible to everyone—Deming calls them a “seeming paradox”—is part of their power, because the combination demands that attentive audiences rethink the issue in order to resolve cognitive dissonance.⁵⁰ In language reminiscent of Kierkegaard, Deming describes this as a “nonviolent dialectic.”⁵¹ Given the illusions people are under, the two messages expressed by the nonviolent activists may seem to contradict each other; by expressing these messages consistently, clearly, and persuasively activists pressure audiences to reconsider their prior conclusions. Nonviolent resistance thus has the power to create what Alasdair MacIntyre calls “epistemological crises.”⁵² For this reason, Deming argues that showing human concern for the opponent while resisting injustice puts more pressure on opponents than dismissive, disrespectful symbolic actions, and thus is a more effective means of bringing about positive change. Nonviolent action has the power not only to

⁵⁰ “In violent battle the effort is to demoralize the enemy, to so frighten him that he will surrender. The risk is that desperation and resentment will make him go on resisting when it is no longer even in his own interest. He has been driven beyond reason. In nonviolent struggle the effort is of quite a different nature. One doesn't try to frighten the other. One tries to undo him—tries, in the current idiom, to ‘blow his mind’—only in the sense that one tries to shake him out of former attitudes and force him to appraise the situation now in a way that takes into consideration your needs as well as his. One is able to do this—able in a real sense to change his mind (rather than to drive him out of it)—precisely because one reassures him about his personal safety all the time that one keeps disrupting the order of things that he has known to date. When—under your constant pressure—it becomes to his own interest to adapt himself to change, he is able to do so. Fear for himself does not prevent him. In this sense a liberation movement that is nonviolent sets the oppressor free as well as the oppressed.” Deming, *We Are All Part of One Another*, 180.

⁵¹ *We Are All Part of One Another*, 290. Cf. *We Cannot Live without Our Lives*, 10–11.

⁵² MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science” *The Monist* 60, no. 4 (October, 1977); *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame, 1988), 361–69.

disrupt the workings of an unjust system (through a boycott, e.g.) but also to disrupt the illusions that people rely on to justify that system and deflect calls for change.

I mentioned that for Deming nonviolence is more effective than violence for bringing about *positive* change, and a few words of clarification are in order. There is no denying that violence can be an effective means for bringing about change. Violence also has expressive power; people can use violence to “send a message.” The philosopher of education Myles Horton writes, “You can’t use force to put ideas in people’s heads,”⁵³ but Horton is only half-correct. There are some lessons one can impart very effectively using force. If you want to put the idea in someone’s head that the world is a dangerous and painful place and that they should not trust others, violence can teach that lesson all too well.

For ICC, the question is not whether violence works as a means to achieve ends, but rather for which ends can violence be usefully employed, which involves asking (1) what implicit messages violence expresses in a situation, and (2) whether expressing those messages is conducive to one’s ultimate ends. In some hypothetical cases the answer is simple. If after vocational discernment you decide to become a supervillain, and your goal is to make people fear and resent you, then I wholeheartedly recommend violence. In other cases, the question is much more complex. For instance, Allied victory in World War I tried to send Germany the message “Don’t invade Europe,” but Hitler and his supporters interpreted this message as “Don’t invade Europe unless you have sufficient strength to take it.” This is what Deming is referring to when she remarks that no one understands violence; the messages we send with violence are seldom received the way we want them to be. What we intend as deterrence is read as

⁵³ Myles Horton, quoted in Josina M. Makau and Debian L. Marty, *Cooperative Argumentation: A Model for Deliberative Community* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2001), 198.

provocation, what we intend as punishment is read as aggression, what we intend as reclamation is read as invasion. The history of violence is beset by costly ironies. Violence is a poor conductor for meaning.

If one's ultimate end is peace, then once again the answer seems simple. A famous protest sign from the Vietnam War era read "Bombing for Peace is like F---ing for Virginty." There is some truth to this, but the issue is more complex than it might seem. First, we need to note the distinction between ultimate ends and proximate ends. Ultimate ends are the guiding, overarching goals of an individual or group, whereas proximate ends are the strategic goals one sets in order to realize or attain these ultimate ends. If one's ultimate end is equality for all people, for example, one might take as a proximate end the passage of a particular law that would expand legal protections for working mothers. This is a rough-and-ready distinction, however. Humans are rarely motivated by clear and distinct ultimate ends, and a person's motivation for pursuing a particular course of action is not always analyzable in terms of overarching goals.⁵⁴

A second helpful distinction is the distinction between negative peace and positive peace.⁵⁵ Negative peace is simply the absence of overt violence, whereas positive peace is the existence of a sustainable and just social order in which concerns can be raised and needs met

⁵⁴ Do I set out to buy a new toothbrush (proximate end) for the purpose of brushing my teeth (proximate end) for the purpose of health (ultimate end) and social interaction (ultimate end)? How many other ultimate ends do I have? And if I am willing to sacrifice my health for a loftier end, does that mean health was only a proximate end? The questions quickly pile up.

⁵⁵ Though the distinction predates him, Johan Galtung is often credited with bringing it to prominence. Galtung's earliest formulation distinguished between "negative peace which is the absence of violence, absence of war—and positive peace which is the integration of human society." Johan Galtung, "An Editorial," *Journal of Peace Research* 1, no. 1 (March, 1964), 1. Galtung's later work, including his analysis of structural violence, expands and nuances this distinction. See Johan Galtung, "Nonviolence and Deep Culture: Some Hidden Obstacles" *Peace Research*, 27, no. 3 (August 1995); *Peace by Peaceful Means* (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo, 1996); *Transcend and Transform* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

without ongoing violence. King makes this distinction throughout his writings, emphasizing that we must not settle for anything less than positive peace. “True peace,” he writes, “is not merely the absence of some negative force—tension, confusion, or war; it is the presence of some positive force—justice, good will, and brotherhood.”⁵⁶ Negative peace can be achieved at least temporarily by violence or the threat of violence. However, as we will discuss, for Gandhi and King positive peace can never be achieved by violence. Though Gandhi and King are critical of war and violence, they took pains to reiterate that the peace they seek is not the peace of a ceasefire or a hegemony, but a network of relationships of mutual recognition, understanding, and accountability.

Bringing these two distinctions together, we can say that for the theorist-practitioners discussed in this chapter, *the ultimate end is positive peace*. Gandhi and King use different language to describe the positive peace they strive to realize, but both are driven by a vision of a better society. They diagnose social ills by contrasting them with a positive vision of social health. Thus, while it is true to say that Gandhi struggled against British rule and King struggled against segregation, they were *against* these precisely because they were *for* freedom, integration, and justice for all people. In order to understand the moral and political philosophies of these leaders, we cannot just ask which evils they oppose, but also what vision of a better society they use to guide their public speech and action.⁵⁷ Getting clear on the ultimate ends

⁵⁶ *A Testament of Hope*, 6. Cf. 50–51, 137; *Stride toward Freedom*, 40; King, “When Peace Becomes Obnoxious,” *The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Vol. III* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 207–8. King differs from Galtung in that he uses the idea of “negative peace” to refer to the absence not just of violence but of overt conflict. Most of his references to negative peace are critical, referring to situations (like Montgomery before the boycotts) in which injustice is endemic but not in the headlines. The civil rights movement had to break the “negative peace which is the absence of tension” (or where existing tensions can be easily ignored) to bring about the “positive peace which is the presence of justice.” *A Testament of Hope*, 295.

⁵⁷ I include the word “public” here as a reminder that Gandhi and King did many actions, especially in their relationships with women, that fell short of or contravened the vision of justice and equality they advocated in their speeches, writings, and protests.

these leaders pursue is essential for understanding how they use ICC to reflect on which means are conducive to these ultimate ends.

“The beloved community” was the name King gave his vision of positive peace, and it served as the ultimate end guiding his symbolic actions.⁵⁸ It shares much in common with Gandhi’s idea of the *sarvodaya* society and Desmond Tutu’s idea of “the rainbow people of God,” but for the sake of space we will focus in this section primarily on King.⁵⁹ The beloved community is a society of “brotherhood, cooperation, and peace” in which people live together free from hostility and fear of one another.⁶⁰ In the beloved community, people live out their interrelatedness and interdependence, seeking to understand one another’s concerns and attend to one another’s needs. The beloved community is not a utopia free from disagreement and conflict, but relationships are strong enough that conflict can be overcome creatively and nonviolently.⁶¹

Justice is part of the beloved community for King, although it is perhaps more accurate to say that King’s understanding of the beloved community informed his understanding of justice. The justice he sought is not a retaliatory, “eye for an eye” justice, in which those who had been oppressors become oppressed and vice versa. For King, justice is a combination of fairness (freedom from discrimination and exploitation), opportunity (freedom from legal and cultural

⁵⁸ “The vision of the Beloved Community was the organizing principle of all King’s thought and activity.” Smith and Zepp, *Search for the Beloved Community*, 129. King borrowed the term “Beloved Community” from Josiah Royce. King never abandoned the idea of the beloved community, though in his later years he spoke more frequently of “the Kingdom of God.” See Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 234.

⁵⁹ All three leaders used different terms to refer to their visions of positive peace. Stellan Vinthagen writes, for example, “Gandhi’s ideal democracy has several names: ‘purna swaraj’ (complete self-rule), ‘integral democracy,’ ‘ramarajaya’ (the people’s sovereignty based on pure moral authority), and ‘sarvodaya’ (a social order that promotes the welfare of all).” Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action*, 141. I treat their terms as roughly synonymous, at the cost of losing some of the nuance, difference, and development in these theorist-practitioners’ thinking.

⁶⁰ *A Testament of Hope*, 54–61.

⁶¹ John B. Hatch, *Race and Reconciliation: Redressing the Wounds of Injustice* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 99. Cf. John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1997). Gandhi’s vision is similar, see Robert Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense*, 107.

boundaries on the pursuit of happiness), and rights (the right to an education, the right to have one's voice heard and matter, etc.). Justice is a matter of human needs and human dignity more so than a matter of retributive punishment. For a society to become just is to take one step closer to becoming the beloved community, to establish an outward baseline of equality even if not an inward recognition of interrelatedness. While King did struggle tirelessly for justice, his pursuit of justice was one part of his more profound pursuit of the beloved community.⁶²

Since the beloved community was King's ultimate end, he argued that any proximate ends in the civil rights struggle had to be chosen and pursued with this ultimate end in mind. This is best illustrated through King's distinction between desegregation (a proximate end, the passage of laws against segregation) and integration (an ultimate end, shorthand for the beloved community). "Desegregation is only a partial, though necessary, step toward the ultimate goal which we seek to realize," King writes, "Desegregation will break down legal barriers, and bring men together physically. But something must happen so as to touch the hearts and souls of men that they will come together, not because the law says it, but because it is natural and right. In other words, our ultimate goal is integration which is genuine intergroup and interpersonal living. Only through nonviolence can this goal be attained, for the aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation and the creation of the beloved community."⁶³ For King, desegregation is a goal worth struggling for, but in pursuing that goal activists need to keep in mind the overarching goal of integration. Proximate ends must be treated as proximate ends and not as ultimate ends, King

⁶² Cf. James Cone, *Martin and Malcolm in America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 64.

⁶³ Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York: Walker and Company, 1981), 48. Cf. *Where Do We Go From Here?*, 100–101. By "integration," King meant an authentic and equitable coming-together of different people and groups in which all parties are transformed. The notion of "integration" has been criticized because for some it signifies a one-directional movement of black communities abandoning aspects of their particularity to integrate into an unaltered white society. See, for example, J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Political Theology*, Revised ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 95. In this dissertation, I use the term in King's sense.

argues. Hence even as activists think tactically about how to organize a successful boycott, he counsels, they must boycott in a spirit of “understanding good will” and “love,” because “the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community.”⁶⁴

We will discuss the relationship between desegregation and integration in greater detail later. For now, the essential point to recognize is that when Gandhi, King, and others use ICC to reason about which means to use for social change, the ends they have in mind are not only proximate ends but ultimate ends.⁶⁵ “Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum*—the greatest good,” Desmond Tutu writes, “Anything that subverts, that undermines this sought-after good, is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive to this good.”⁶⁶ Even if resentment and aggressive competitiveness can help bring about the proximate end of the legal dismantling of apartheid, they jeopardize the ultimate end of positive peace, of full humanization of all people and “true reconciliation.”⁶⁷

Likewise, for Gandhi, ousting the British Raj was a proximate end, one that theoretically could have been achieved by violence. Gandhi did not advocate taking up arms against the British, not out of merely instrumental reasoning (e.g., that Indians would likely be defeated in a war for independence) nor out of merely prescriptive procedural moral reasoning (e.g., that there

⁶⁴ *A Testament of Hope*, 140.

⁶⁵ Arne Naess explains that for Gandhi, “The character of the means used in a group struggle determines the character of the results... If we take self-realization to be the ultimate goal, and a non-violent society to be a necessary condition for reaching supremely high levels of self-realization, all non-ultimate ends and all means must be judged in relation to self-realization and the non-violent society.” *Gandhi and Group Conflict* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1974), 62, 64.

⁶⁶ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 31. Cf. *God Has a Dream*, 27. On “success through aggressive competitiveness,” see Johnny Hill, *The Theology of Martin Luther King Jr. and Desmond Mpilo Tutu* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 102. As I argue in section IV.D, *pace* Tutu there is a constructive use of anger that is commensurate with the spirit of nonviolent direct action.

⁶⁷ Desmond Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God*, 19.

is an inviolable commandment against the use of violence), but because his ultimate end was not simply Indian self-governance but *purna swaraj* and *sarvodaya*, that is, an Indian society capable of self-governance, committed to truth and *ahimsa*, in which all people regardless of color or class are treated with respect and good will. Gandhi called this “the greatest good of all,”⁶⁸ and insisted on using what Galtung calls “goal-revealing forms of struggle.”⁶⁹ The goal to be revealed in activists’ implicit messages is not merely the proximate goal—for example, the repeal of an unjust tax—but the overarching goal that provides the spirit and motivation for the entire movement.⁷⁰

With these distinctions, we can understand some of Gandhi’s and King’s bold claims about the inadequacy of violence. Gandhi writes, “I swear by nonviolence because I know that it alone conduces to the highest good of mankind, not merely in the next world, but in this also. I object to violence because, when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary, the evil it does is permanent.”⁷¹ Violence is undeniably a means to achieve proximate ends, including proximate ends that are genuinely worthwhile. But in the pursuit of those proximate ends, Gandhi argues, violence jeopardizes our pursuit of the ultimate end, the “highest good of mankind.” This ultimate end is not an impossible utopian ideal but a social reality that can be attained, or at least approximated, in this world. We can call this idealistic, but the reasoning is

⁶⁸ *The Essential Gandhi*, ed. Louis Fischer, 265.

⁶⁹ Johan Galtung, *The Way is the Goal* (Ahmedabad, India : Gujarat Vidyapith, 1992), 189. Cf. Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action*, 218.

⁷⁰ The idea of pursuing proximate ends with the ultimate end in mind is not unique to nonviolence but can be found also in strategic and moral reflection on how to fight wars. Just-war theorist Oliver O’Donovan, for example, writes, “An act of war, then, may be disproportionate even if it ensures victory, and even if nothing less would have ensured victory; for it may frustrate the very object for which the conflict was joined in the first place.” *The Just War Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 62. Cf. Clausewitz, *On War*, 184–185.

⁷¹ *The Essential Gandhi*, 175. This is a central theme for Gandhi; Arne Naess writes, “The essential and most important point in Gandhi’s doctrine, taken as a whole, is not a principle or a commandment, but the working hypothesis that the nonviolent resolution of a group conflict is a practicable goal—despite our own, and our opponents’ imperfections; that nonviolent means are in the long run more effective and reliable than violent ones, and that they should be trusted even if they seem for the moment unsatisfactory.” *Gandhi and Group Conflict*, 15

not, “in an ideal world we would not have to use violence,” but rather “violence is counter-productive to bringing about the society which we desire and are working to cultivate.”

In the next section, I argue that some of the reasoning for this conclusion can be best explained in terms of ICC, and that Gandhi’s and King’s practical case for nonviolent direct action involves a series of arguments about why, in the pursuit of positive social change, violence and hostile and antagonistic symbolic actions are self-betraying communication.

IV. Implicit Messages

In this section, we will analyze a series of interrelated points Gandhi, King, and their inheritors and interpreters make regarding the use of nonviolent direct action. For King and Gandhi, as we have seen, means and ends are integrally related. I argue that paying attention to the communicative dimension of symbolic actions offers some insight into this integral relation. King and Gandhi opted consistently for nonviolent direct action in part out of a concern for the implicit messages these actions send to various audiences—opponents, onlookers, and activists themselves. Following Deming, I argue that nonviolence owes its distinctive power to its combination of resistance to injustice and human concern for all people, including people who (for the moment) oppose the social changes activists seek to bring about. Nonviolent direct action that is simultaneously practical and moral is pursued in a manner that expresses as clearly as possible to all relevant audiences both this resistance and this compassion. Nonviolent activists are not only committed to justice for all, motivated by a vision of a better society, and concerned for the opponent’s well-being, they actively seek to *show* this commitment, *exhibit* this vision of a better society, and *convey* their concern for the well-being of the opponent. When performed consistently and creatively, nonviolence has the ability not only to shift power from one group to another but to transform how people think about power and about social divisions.

Nonviolent direct action is more disruptive and more revolutionary than antagonistic methods because it challenges not only those in power but the illusions used to justify and sustain the present power structure. For this reason King calls nonviolence “dynamically aggressive” and “the ultimate form of persuasion.”⁷²

The communicative dimension of nonviolent direct action does not take place in a vacuum. Activists using ICC to guide their symbolic actions need to be alert to the illusions that get in the way of clearly and persuasively expressing the different aspects of their complex message. “The nonviolent struggle,” Stellan Vinthagen writes, “must try to make sure that it is difficult to misrepresent.”⁷³ In the rest of this section, we will discuss not only how nonviolent activists can express messages conducive to their ultimate ends, but how they can counteract and circumvent the illusions that prevent positive social change from happening. This includes illusions about the situation (e.g., the illusion that no change is needed, the illusion that the proposed change would have catastrophic consequences) and illusions about the activists’ motivations (e.g., the illusion that the activists are not genuinely invested in the issue, the illusion that the activists want victory at the expense of the opponents). As much as possible, nonviolent direct action makes these illusions harder to maintain, increasing the cognitive dissonance of those who dismiss the activists or their cause while pointing the way to a more truthful, sustainable social order.

IV.A. Not Silence or Reprisal, but Disrupting Injustice

⁷² *A Testament of Hope*, 7, 484. Nonviolence has often been charged with naïveté about the workings of power. For two different rebuttals to this, see Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), part 1, and Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action*, chapter 5.

⁷³ Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action*, 251.

Nonviolent direct action needs to interrupt the smooth functioning of the unjust status quo. This is what distinguishes nonviolent direct action from negotiation, argumentation, and discussion. But even as nonviolent direct action is different from these, it has them as proximate goals. King writes,

You may well ask, ‘Why direct action, why sit-ins, marches, and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?’ You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has consistently refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. *It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored...* I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need of having nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. So, the purpose of direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation.⁷⁴

Elsewhere, King clarifies that these protests are not taken with the goal of creating new tension so much as surfacing the tensions already present.⁷⁵ Put differently, nonviolent direct action needs to shine a spotlight on injustice, and in so doing challenge the illusion that the present social order is just. At the same time, activists seek to express a second message: this injustice must not be allowed to continue, and we will not let it be ignored any longer.

⁷⁴ *A Testament of Hope*, 291–92. Emphasis mine. Deming likewise speaks of nonviolence in terms of drama, writing, “Our hope is to make it hard for them to look away from certain facts. (Gandhi called nonviolence ‘clinging to the truth.’) Like so many others who hold power, they are adept at dismissing pleas, even at persuading themselves that no real discontent exists; and adept, too, at disposing of those who persist in crying that it does. The play into which we draw them must make it hard for them to do this, and it must at the same time make it possible for them to imagine a new situation fairer to us all.” *Prisons that Could Not Hold*, 67–68, cf. 70–71 on nonviolence as a “dramatic technique.”

⁷⁵ *A Testament of Hope*, 350. King adds, “To cure injustices, you must expose them before the light of human conscience and the bar of human opinion, regardless of whatever tension that exposure generates.” *A Testament of Hope*, 350.

For this communicative goal, there is strength in numbers. If thousands of people are marching in protest, it is difficult for those who do not recognize the injustice to continue acting as if there were no problem. Opponents of the movement can still insist that the protestors are only parroting the opinions of an agitator or media outlet who exaggerates or manufactures the social problem, but this is harder to maintain in the face of a large, diverse, informed protest.

For injustices that are more difficult to recognize, or in situations where protest actions will not be as noticeable, even greater numbers and more disruptive actions are needed. Toward the end of his career, when he turned more of his attention to economic injustice the northern United States, King argued that “mass civil disobedience” would be needed in order to dramatize the issue. “The effectiveness of street marches in cities is limited because the normal turbulence of city life absolves them as mere transitory drama quite common in the ordinary movement of masses. In the South, a march was a social earthquake; in the north it is a faint brief exclamation of protest.”⁷⁶ He adds, “We’ve got to find a method that will disrupt our cities if necessary, create the crisis that will force the nation to look at the situation... and yet at the same time not destroy life or property.”⁷⁷

Even as protestors seek to communicate through words and actions that there is a present injustice and that it can no longer be ignored, there is a third message: that protestors are willing to work collaboratively to resolve the tension. As King’s earlier quotation indicates, one of the goals of these symbolic actions is to facilitate negotiation, to transform the monologue of power

⁷⁶ *Trumpet of Conscience*, 15.

⁷⁷ King, quoted in Nojeim, *Gandhi and King*, 192. The question of property destruction is a contested one in the nonviolent direct action tradition. ICC, I believe, can help actionists weigh the relative symbolic merits of an act of property destruction versus the possibility for the actions to be misconstrued as mere lawlessness. The Plowshares Movement offers one noteworthy example of property destruction attentive to the communicative dimension.

into a dialogue.⁷⁸ Thus the means of disruptive action is pursued to bring about the proximate end of negotiation and collaborative problem-solving, which is in turn pursued to bring about the ultimate end of helping all parties “rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood,” that is, the beloved community. King and Gandhi maintain that the goal of direct action is a collaborative dialogue in which the oppressed group has fair representation in the problem-solving process, not the replacement of one monologue with another.⁷⁹ This goal colors and informs the spirit of the symbolic actions taken to bring it about. King writes,

The nonviolent resisters can summarize their message in the following terms: We will take direct action against injustice without waiting for other agencies to act. We will not obey unjust laws or submit to unjust practices. We will do this peacefully, openly, and cheerfully because our aim is to persuade. We adopt the means of nonviolence because our end is a community at peace with itself. We will try to persuade with our words, but, if our words fail, we will try to persuade with our acts. We will always be willing to talk and seek a fair compromise, but we are ready to suffer when necessary and even risk our lives to become witnesses to the truth as we see it.⁸⁰

For the point I am arguing in this chapter, the key word in this passage is “because.” King is here using ICC: to keep the goal of persuasion and dialogue in focus, activists will use means that make persuasion and dialogue possible. Whatever it may look like in practice to resist “peacefully, openly, and cheerfully,” it certainly involves not silencing opponents or treating

⁷⁸ The quotation continues, “We therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in the tragic attempt to live in monologue rather than dialogue.”

⁷⁹ Vinthagen emphasizes this point, writing that “the main goal of nonviolence is a mutual truth attained through nonviolence (satyagraha) and that *the types of action can be understood as rational ways of dealing with anything that hinders the search for mutual truth*. The goal of nonviolent struggle is that all parties involved in a conflict reach consensus, both in a rational agreement and in a social arrangement that all can accept (both cognitively and emotionally). Though his ‘experiments’ with the truth in social conflicts, Gandhi tried to provide a method for reaching that point together, in the most effective way. A nonviolent conflict transformation furthers the conditions of a genuine dialogue. But in highly divisive conflicts, it is often not enough for one party to try to show goodwill. For that reason, nonviolent conflict management needs to try to *counteract the hurdles* in the path of dialogue and agreement.” He concludes, “it can be said that power breaking achieved by resistance is a precondition for dialogue and that dialogue is part of the goal of resistance.” *A Theory of Nonviolent Action*, 128, 155.

⁸⁰ *A Testament of Hope*, 103. Cf. 149, 485.

them as if their needs and concerns are invalid. It involves actions that convey to opponents that their voices matter and will continue to be part of the conversation about how all parties can move forward, though they will no longer be able to drown out the voices of the marginalized.⁸¹ In nonviolent campaigns, acts of resistance (boycotts, strikes, etc.) are not only carried out to compel those in power to negotiate, they are carried out *in such a way to make that negotiation possible*. Nonviolent activists seek to counteract the illusion that they simply want to impose their agenda on others.

Though we have been focusing on the expressive features of nonviolent direct action, activists do place material pressure on systems. Boycotts, for instance, put economic pressure on organizations to cease unjust activities. The goal is not simply to dramatize the injustice and make it difficult to ignore or explain away, but to make the injustice *costly*, thereby incentivizing opponents to change their policies.⁸² Civil disobedience impedes those in power from conducting business as usual. The goal of these campaigns is not only to persuade people that a certain course of action is more just than another, but to coerce people, to work against their will. To discuss the many campaigns carried out by Gandhi and King would take us far afield, I will simply mention that even these actions, too, have a communicative dimension, and that Gandhi and King insist activists pay attention to this communicative dimension as well as the material pressure placed on the system. King reiterates that nonviolent action should simultaneously involve *pressure and persuasion*, not persuasionless pressure or pressureless persuasion.⁸³

⁸¹ *A Testament of Hope*, 365. Desmond Tutu advises leaders, “Don’t let any feel like they have been left out. Any group, however small, which has grievances, real or imaginary, must not feel excluded; otherwise you can kiss goodbye to peace. Let them be represented by those they regard as their authentic spokespersons.” Quoted in Allen, *Rabble-Rouser for Peace*, 381.

⁸² Gene Sharp’s analysis of more coercive nonviolent means is helpful here. See *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 731–54.

⁸³ *Where Do We Go from Here?*, 129–130. Cf. *A Testament of Hope*, 188, 292.

Take, for example, King's aforementioned call for mass civil disobedience. He writes, "There must be more than a statement to the larger society. There must be a force that interrupts its functioning at some key point; that interruption must, however, not be clandestine or surreptitious. It is not necessary to invest it with guerrilla romanticism. It must be open and above all conducted by large masses without violence. If the jails are filled to thwart it the meaning will become even clearer."⁸⁴ Even as King argues that this civil disobedience must be "dislocative and disruptive,"⁸⁵ interfering with the "functioning" of the present social order, he also says that it must be "open," that is, explained freely to all audiences, and that the "meaning" should be made clear.

Nonviolent direct actionists can thus use power—economic power, institutional power, legal authority, physical noncooperation, and so on—but always coupled with an appeal to the reason and conscience of those affected by this power. Deming puts it well: "To resort to power one need not be violent, and to speak to conscience one need not be meek. The most effective action *both* resorts to power *and* engages conscience."⁸⁶ The vision of a world these activists are striving for is not one in which no one has or uses power, but rather one in which power is always accountable to those affected by it. It is not a world in which everyone gets what they want, but a world in which the needs, concerns, and voices of all are taken into account.

One action that is emblematic of this combination is Gandhi's trip to Lancashire, England in 1931. The textile workers in that region had lost business due to the Indian boycott of British cotton goods, and thousands were unemployed as a result.⁸⁷ Gandhi went out of his way to spend

⁸⁴ *Trumpet of Conscience*, 16.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Nojeim, *Gandhi and King*, 255.

⁸⁶ *We Are All Part of One Another*, 175.

⁸⁷ Catherine Pye, "Gandhi's Visit to Darwen Remembered 80 Years On," *Lancashire Telegraph*, September 26, 2011, <https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/9270692.gandhis-visit-to-darwen-remembered-80-years-on/>.

two days there, meeting locals and listening to stories. He told the workers that he understood their plight and tried to explain the Indian hardships that necessitated the action. Though Gandhi recognized that these workers had “reason for becoming irritated against me,”⁸⁸ he was received warmly. Gandhi’s visit illustrates the combination of pressure with persuasion—in this case, persuasion both with his words and with the symbolic gesture of visiting the mills in person and listening as textile workers shared their experiences.

Nonviolent activists can take actions which inconvenience, disturb, and infuriate people, actions which remove them from positions of authority and interfere with their livelihoods. But as with Deming’s “two handed communication,” uses of power are accompanied by sincere efforts to express to those affected people—in ways they can be expected to understand—why these actions are taken, what vision of a better world is being realized, and how the needs of the affected people are being considered and addressed as much as realistically possible. Nonviolent direct actionists seek, as much as possible, to replace coercive “power-over” with collaborative “power-with.” But when they do use coercive power, to be consistent with their convictions, they do so dialogically.

IV.B. Not Prompting Defensiveness, but Inviting Change

Many of the theorist-practitioners discussed in this chapter make the case that violence, even small-scale violence, is counterproductive in the struggle for justice.⁸⁹ As Deming argues,

Nandini Rathi, “When Mahatma Gandhi was welcomed by textile mill workers of Lancashire,” *The Indian Express*, October 2, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/research/when-gandhi-was-welcomed-by-textile-mill-workers-of-lancashire-england-in-1931-4869860/>.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi*, 337.

⁸⁹ Gene Sharp reiterates this, writing, “Violence will enable the opponent who had been unsettled by courageous nonviolence to resume his previous certainty and views, saying, ‘I told you so...’ Also, the opponent’s violence will no longer rebound against him by alienating his usual supporters, or by bringing sympathy and support from third parties. As resistance violence leads to a contraction of support for the nonviolent group in the grievance group, the opponent group, and among third parties, the chances of change by nonviolent coercion and conversion are almost

one advantage of consistent nonviolent performance is that activists make it difficult for defenders of the present unjust order to justify repressive measures to keep the peace. She quotes King, “They can handle violence; but we have a weapon they can’t handle.”⁹⁰ In this subsection, we will explore the evidence for the (perhaps counter-intuitive) conclusion that nonviolence is harder for the forces of oppression and injustice to suppress than violent rebellion.

If an activist movement is violent, even if their violence is a justifiable reaction to “the violence of the status quo,”⁹¹ they play into the hands of those with greater coercive power. Defenders of the status quo can justify using violent force not only against those who act violently but against the movement as a whole. Nobel Peace Prize winner Albert Luthuli writes that in South Africa, “The activities of rioters provided the pretext for crushing nonviolent demonstrators.”⁹² Gandhi and King, for this reason if no other, insisted that all participants in their marches and demonstrations adhere to a strict code of nonviolence.⁹³ King argues, “Many

entirely eliminated.” *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 601. Cf. 458, 594–608. Dellinger writes, “A nonviolent movement for social revolution has the potential of mobilizing and strengthening the exploited (without turning them into tyrants in reverse), of weakening and demoralizing the Establishment (by robbing it of its pseudo-moral justifications) and of winning over or neutralizing the ambivalent middle (who, in a contest of violence, tend to side with the established order).” *Revolutionary Nonviolence*, 212; cf. 272–73, 321.

⁹⁰ King, quoted in Deming, *We Are All Part of One Another*, 120.

⁹¹ Deming borrows this phrase from AFSC organizer Russell Johnson (no relation). *We Are All Part of One Another*, 168.

⁹² Quoted in Sharp, 602.

⁹³ Gandhi writes, “The first condition therefore of real success is to ensure entire absence of violence. Violence done to persons representing the government or to persons who don’t join our ranks, i.e. supporters of the government, means in every case retrogression in our cause, cessation of non-cooperation and useless waste of innocent lives.” *Nonviolent Resistance*, 124. For the Commitment Card King required participants in the Birmingham struggle to sign, including a pledge of nonviolence, see Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can’t Wait* (Boston: Beacon, 2011), 69.

of our opponents would be delighted... if we would take up arms, it would give them an excuse to kill up a lot of us.”⁹⁴ Nonviolence, by contrast, “has a way of disarming the opponent.”⁹⁵

The reasoning is simple. Those in power need to be able to justify repressive actions, not only to their own consciences, but to those on whom their power depends. If the public and the agents tasked with carrying out repressive actions can recognize that the activists are not an immediate threat to their lives or property, then those in power seem tyrannical. Gandhi writes, “The might of the tyrant recoils upon himself when he meets with no response, even as an arm violently waved in the air suffers dislocation.”⁹⁶ Of course, opponents of the movement can create false flags or invent spurious justifications for repressive violence, but these become less and less credible if the movement is consistently peaceful and forthright about their intentions and methods. Nonviolent activists may seem defenseless in the face of armed opposition, but history shows that well-organized nonviolent direct action campaigns suffer fewer casualties than violent ones.⁹⁷

To use the language of ICC, in a situation in which people are liable to fear, suspect, and believe the worst about a particular group, that group needs to be cognizant of the illusion that they are or will soon become a threat to the lives and well-being of others. In that situation,

⁹⁴ From a speech in New York in 1964. Quoted in Cone, 204. Cf. 76–77. Cone clarifies, “As a matter of fact King did not deny the right of self-defense for any individual in the privacy of his or her home, or any other place. But he contended that self-defense should not be advocated as a program of freedom for the poor; he held that position because he believed that in a public demonstration it was too difficult to distinguish defensive violence from aggressive violence. The posture of self-defense would only invite violence from the oppressor and thereby confuse the moral issue at stake... Imitating the oppressor, using retaliatory violence, will not gain freedom for the oppressed, King contended. It merely escalates the violence and makes it more difficult to achieve peace among people. Martin criticized Malcolm [X] and other nationalists in rejecting white values in everything except their views on violence” *Martin and Malcolm in America*, 131.

⁹⁵ *A Testament of Hope*, 334. Cf. 59.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Sharp, 698. Dellinger writes, “Even tyrants must maintain a façade of legitimacy and justice and must be able to characterize their opponents as evil men—or they gradually lose control.” *Revolutionary Nonviolence*, 211.

⁹⁷ Robert Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense*, 240.

violent actions are self-betraying communication because they confirm (or can be re-narrated to confirm) the illusions audiences have about the group and which responses are necessary and justifiable.⁹⁸ Violent protests challenge the policies of their opponents but ironically confirm the suspicions of their opponent, playing into the very narratives that rationalize the unjust status quo.

In a situation like the one King faced, symbolic actions that are firm in their opposition to injustice while allaying audiences' fears is integral communication. King writes that "The Negro... must convince the white man that all he seeks is justice, *for both himself and the white man*. A mass movement exercising nonviolence is an object lesson in power under discipline, a demonstration to the white community that if such a movement attained a degree of strength, it would use its power creatively and not vengefully."⁹⁹ King's argument here is about the communicative dimension of protest; in the struggle for justice, civil rights activists need to convey an implicit message of strength and compassion with the means they employ.

In addition to minimizing casualties and allaying undue fears as much as possible, nonviolent protest has the advantage of keeping the issue in focus. Consider King's argument about the limited value of riots:

I must say, however, that riots such as have occurred do achieve at least one partially positive effect: they dramatically focus national attention on the Negro's discontent. Unfortunately, they also give the white majority an excuse, a provocation, to look away from the cause of the riots—the poverty and the deprivation and the degradation of the Negro, especially in the slums and ghettos

⁹⁸ King writes, "The problem with hatred and violence is that they intensify the fears of the white majority, and leave them less ashamed of their prejudices toward Negroes. In the guilt and confusion confronting our society, violence only adds to the chaos. It deepens the brutality of the oppressor and increases the bitterness of the oppressed." *A Testament of Hope*, 593.

⁹⁹ *A Testament of Hope*, 484; cf. 593.

where the riots occur—and to talk instead of looting, and of the breakdown and law and order.¹⁰⁰

Riots get attention, but all too often they draw attention to the rioting rather than to the injustice that prompted it. As we have discussed, riots make it easy for opponents to paint protesters as petulant, destructive, chaotic, and in other ways *part of the problem*, and make it likewise easy for onlookers to sympathize with those who would restore order.¹⁰¹ Riots, that is, challenge the illusion that everything is copacetic, but they do not adequately challenge—indeed often feed into—other illusions that impede positive social change.

Nonviolent action, by contrast, is dynamic and multifaceted. Contrast King’s discussion of riots with his subsequent account of nonviolent direct action:

Boycotting buses in Montgomery, demonstrating in Birmingham, the citadel of segregation, and defying guns, dogs, and clubs in Selma, while maintaining disciplined nonviolence, totally confused the rulers of the South. If they let us march, they admitted their lie that the black man was content. If they shot us down, they told the world they were inhuman brutes. They tried to stop us by threats and fear, the tactic that had long worked so effectively. But nonviolence had muzzled their guns and Negro defiance had shaken their confidence. When they finally reached for clubs, dogs, and guns, they found the world was watching, and then the power of nonviolent protest became manifest. It dramatized the essential meaning of the conflict and in magnified strokes made clear who was the evildoer and who was the undeserving victim.¹⁰²

By comparing these two passages, we can discern a few important points. First, whereas violence tends to keep the focus on itself, often eclipsing the discontent that gives rise to it, nonviolence

¹⁰⁰ *A Testament of Hope*, 359–60. Cf. Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 597. King writes elsewhere that riots are “self-defeating” and that they “destroy the many creative steps that we have made in a forward sense over the last few years.” *A Testament of Hope*, 383; cf. 484. Riots and threats did indirectly help the civil rights movement make progress, but this happened primarily when these riots and threats were conducted by groups that were distinct from King’s own organizations, thereby making those in power more willing to work with King and his associates. See James Cone, *Martin and Malcolm in America*, inter alia.

¹⁰¹ To say that existing prejudices exacerbate this tendency would be an understatement.

¹⁰² *Trumpet of Conscience*, 5–6. Cf. *A Testament of Hope*, 214.

“dramatizes the essential meaning of the conflict.” It brings clarity to the situation even as it disrupts the existing order.

Second, nonviolent action makes it difficult for those in power to resort to their customary means of maintaining order. By being an embodied resistance to the present power structure, nonviolence makes itself harder to ignore than mere verbal dissent. By not posing a threat to anyone’s life, nonviolence makes itself harder to silence than mere revolt. Those in power cannot rely on their customary strategies (conscious or unconscious) for resisting change, because the nonviolent activists are compelling them to play a different sort of game. Efforts to quash the nonviolent campaign in conventional ways only serve to further the actionists’ cause because in lashing out at the protesters’ *bodies*, agents of repression are only confirming the protesters’ *narrative*. Witness, for example, how Bull Connor became an unwitting ally in the civil rights movement’s quest to expose the violence and prejudice of Birmingham’s leadership. This aspect of nonviolent direct action is what Richard Gregg and many since him refer to as “moral jiu-jitsu.”¹⁰³

In addition to preventing opponents from relying on their playbook, nonviolent direct action creates as much as possible the conditions for clearheaded, critical assessment of the facts. Nonviolent actionists try not to instill fear and defensiveness in their opponents and in bystanders, not only because fear can lead to repressive reactions, but also because people are more likely to make sober judgments when they are not afraid. Gene Sharp summarizes the point well, “When an opponent feels a campaign to be a personal attack on himself—psychological if not physical—he is more likely to resist changes in his outlook and his policies, and to be more

¹⁰³ Richard Gregg, *The Power of Non-Violence*, chapter 2. Cf. Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 110; Cortright, *Gandhi and Beyond*, 127–28.

impervious to appeals from the actionists and third parties, than when the actionists are able to convince him they bear him no personal hostility and are concerned only with policies.”¹⁰⁴ When opponents do not feel attacked, they are less provoked to shore up their own power and more willing to entertain proposals for a more just social order.

So far in this section, the reasoning seems very strategic: do not play the opponent’s game, but make the opponent play your game. But this strategy is conducive to one’s ends only if one believes their interpretation of the events becomes more persuasive when clearly stated and patiently considered.¹⁰⁵ If nonviolent methods shine a light on the question of whether the social order in question is just or unjust—in King’s words, “dramatize the essential meaning of the conflict”—then these methods will be most useful to those who believe their viewpoint can persuade on its own merits. Keeping the focus on the issues and facts performatively expresses to all audiences that one is genuinely convinced of one’s assessment of those issues and facts. Clarity favors the truth, fear and confusion favor the lie. Thus, here, too, activists’ ends play an important role in their adoption of nonviolent means. If the end is to get audiences to see things as they really are, then means that dispel illusions and do not unnecessarily prompt defensive and fearful reactions will be integral communication.

Dellinger makes this point well, writing, “Those who combine nonviolence with intransigence transfer the battle from a contest of arms in which the soldier and the cop have the

¹⁰⁴ *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 727. Sharp is summarizing one aspect of Gandhi’s approach to nonviolent conversion. King reasoned this way about the Montgomery campaign, concluding afterward, “Moreover, the effort to convince white bus riders and the white public in general that we did not intend to boast of our victory or to take over the buses apparently got across. The white people, knowing our attitude, had no reason to prepare for aggression or to assume a stiff posture of defense.” *Stride Toward Freedom*, 183.

¹⁰⁵ King was skeptical that nonviolent methods could be effectively used for unjust causes: “When the idea is a sound one, the cause is a just one, and the demonstration a righteous one, change will be forthcoming. But if any of these conditions are not present, the power for change is missing also.” *A Testament of Hope*, 59. Gandhi writes, “There can be no *satyagraha* in an unjust cause.” *Non-violent Resistance*, 56.

advantage, to a contest in which the advantage lies with those whose cause is just.” He adds later, “Nonviolence must rely even more heavily than guerrilla warfare on the justice of its cause. It has no chance of success unless it can win supporters from previously hostile or neutral sections of the populace. It must do this by the fairness of its goals. *Its objectives and methods are intimately interrelated and must be equally nonviolent.*”¹⁰⁶ This is, in short, what I have been arguing this chapter. Because nonviolent actionists’ goal is for all parties to recognize truth and justice, they must use means conducive to the collaborative search for truth and justice. The use of coercive power can play a role in this, but it brings with it the risk of distraction, resentment, and occasions for all parties to try to resolve conflicts by a contest of strength rather than an honest assessment of the situation. By refusing to play the game of attacks and counterattacks, nonviolent activists invite all parties to play a different game, one that is simultaneously more conducive to their ends and closer to the kind of social interactions they hope to cultivate.

IV.C. Not Zero-sum Conflict, but a Better Society for Everyone

I have been speaking of nonviolent direct action as trying to change the game from a contest of strength to a dialogical pursuit of truth and justice. This game metaphor is helpful, because it illustrates the strategic dimension of nonviolence. Sports coaches often talk about making opponents play “our game,” rather than getting drawn into opponent’s strategies. Through noncooperation, perseverance, and integral communication, activists can “make them play our game,” resisting not only opponents’ direct pressures but also opponents’ ability to dictate the nature of the conflict.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Dellinger, *Revolutionary Nonviolence*, 211, 299. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁷ This is also a core principle of military strategy, which Gandhi drew upon in his campaigns. “To resort to violence, declared Gandhi, is to ‘cooperate with the government in the most active manner.’ ‘Restraint under the gravest provocation,’ he insisted, ‘is the truest mark of soldiership.’ Just as even a novice in ‘the art of war knows that he must avoid the ambushes of his adversary,’ so nonviolent actionists must see every provocation as ‘a

The game metaphor is helpful, but also misleading. The ultimate goal of nonviolent direct action is not victory over the opponents, but something like the beloved community. It is not a victory of “us” over “them,” but a triumph of *justice for all over the injustice that divides and dehumanizes*.¹⁰⁸ Part of the effectiveness of nonviolent direct action comes from actionists’ ability to keep this ultimate goal in mind, express it through words and actions, and refuse to frame the issue as a zero-sum conflict between mutually opposed groups.

In *The Psychology of Nonviolence*, Leroy Pelton writes:

Nonviolent action does not aim for victory over the adversary. Conflict is not taken as a game in which there is a winner and a loser and in which we attempt to ‘beat’ the other party. On the contrary, the nonviolent activist strives to avoid this game mentality. What is sought is a resolution of the conflict at a higher level of understanding and satisfaction (for both parties) than perhaps either party possessed before the conflict resolution. The resolution that emerges is ideally a new Gestalt, or structure, in which both parties are somewhat transformed.¹⁰⁹

For Pelton, as for Gandhi and King, the aim is not victory at the expense of opponents but the achievement of a better social order for all, including those who currently oppose the movement. The unjust status quo deprives and debases even those who come out on top.

This is an important—and often overlooked—part of the nonviolent direct action tradition. Desmond Tutu puts it starkly, “Oppression dehumanizes the oppressor as much as, if not more than, the oppressed.”¹¹⁰ Nelson Mandela likewise writes that while in prison, “I knew

dangerous ambush into which we must resolutely refuse to walk.” Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Resistance*, 594.

¹⁰⁸ “This is not a war between the white and the Negro, but a conflict between justice and injustice.” King, quoted in Cone, *Martin and Malcolm in America*, 64.

¹⁰⁹ Leroy Pelton, *The Psychology of Nonviolence* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1974), 17. Joan Bondurant writes that the *satyagrahi* “recognizes, and attempts to demonstrate to his opponent that he recognizes, the desirability of a resulting synthesis, and that he is not seeking a one-sided triumph. His effort is to allow for the best restructuring of the situation. He seeks a victory, not over the opponent, but over the situation in the best (in the sense of the total needs of the situation) synthesis possible.” Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 196. Cf. April Carter, “Nonviolence as a Strategy for Change,” 210.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Allen, *Rabble-Rouser for Peace*, 150. Cf. Desmond Tutu, *God Has a Dream*, 25–26, 49–50; *No Future without Forgiveness*, 31, 103, 196, 265; *The Rainbow People of God*, 125.

as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness... The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity."¹¹¹ Gandhi and King speak in similar terms about the alienating and dehumanizing effects of oppressive systems on all involved, and how the suffering of one person affects all others.¹¹² They also talk more practically about the material disadvantages of segregation and colonization. Gandhi argued in 1931, for example, that Great Britain would be better off economically with India as a trade partner than as a colony.¹¹³ It would be beyond the scope of this chapter to explore these theorist-practitioners' reasoning in its spiritual, psychological, and material dimensions. The salient point for now is that King and Gandhi believed the beloved community and the *sarvodaya* society are better than the present unjust order, not only for the oppressed but for the oppressors. The victory of a nonviolent direct action is thus not so much over an opponent as for an opponent, though the opponent does not at present see it as such.

Activists are striving for a better social order for all involved, and this is something that must be communicated to all involved. "In your struggle for justice," King preaches, "let your oppressor know that you are not attempting to defeat or humiliate him, or even to pay him back for injustices that he has heaped upon you. Let him know that you are merely seeking justice for him as well as yourself. Let him know that the festering sore of segregation debilitates the white man as well as the Negro."¹¹⁴ Gandhi similarly writes that compassion and the desire to do the opponent good should "show themselves in every act of a *satyagrahi*," and that activists should

¹¹¹ Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1995), 624. Cf. Esquivel, *Christ in a Poncho*, 125.

¹¹² See, for example, *A Testament of Hope*, 625–26; *The Essential Gandhi*, 265.

¹¹³ Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi*, 330–31.

¹¹⁴ *A Testament of Hope*, 10. Cf. 7, 12–13, 17, 119, 482–83, 487.

ensure the opponent “feel[s] that the resistance is not intended to do him any harm.”¹¹⁵ This attention to whether the opponent feels threatened may seem like coddling, or an overly sensitive preoccupation with the opponents’ feelings that comes at the expense of speaking truth to power. I argue, however, that this is integral communication. The activists’ words and actions are still disruptive and confrontational, but by assuring opponents that their needs matter and that they will not be harmed or have their rights infringed upon in the struggle or its aftermath, activists make their message clearer and more difficult to denigrate.

As with Freire’s dialogue, this mode of struggle humanizes all who participate in it. This is crucial because an essential part of the nonviolent activists’ ends is the humanization of all people. It would be self-betraying communication to insist that all people have dignity but then act as though the opponent did not. Of course, an opponent can always claim that they are being disrespected, or that activists are motivated only by resentment or ambition. Activists cannot completely avoid this, but they can make these accusations less credible both to onlookers and to opponents themselves.¹¹⁶ By avoiding the temptations to score easy political points, make threats and *ad hominem* attacks, take cheap shots, use stereotypes, and silence opponents, activists can dispel the illusion that they are only interested in securing coercive power for selfish motives. By refusing to play the familiar games of zero-sum political partisanship, nonviolent activists enact an alternative politics, one driven less by competitive success than by addressing the needs and concerns of everyone in a society. By showing that one does not need to silence others in order to have one’s voice heard, nonviolent actionists reverse the spiraling effects of destructive social

¹¹⁵ Mohandas Gandhi, *An Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans Mahadev Desai (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927), 402; *Non-violent Resistance*, 306; cf. 201–2, 292.

¹¹⁶ Even malicious opponents will only make accusations they think they can get away with among those who provide them with power. Activist groups need to maintain consistent discipline and public integrity, if for no other reason than to make false accusations seem absurd rather than plausible.

conflict discussed in chapter 2. Nonviolent actionists can improve the conditions of communication and mutual understanding within a society.

It is easy to say that one wants a better world for all people. The challenge is making this message credible by the way one treats others and oneself not only after but during social conflict. When one's end is the beloved community, extending good will to one's opponents is not compromising one's convictions but professing these convictions clearly and consistently. Symbolic actions that break down antagonism and build trust between conflicting parties are of practical value for attaining proximate ends (i.e., making negotiations feasible).¹¹⁷ But more than this, these actions represent and actualize the beloved community. Nonviolent direct action is thus more dynamic than strategies to win zero-sum conflict because it creates what it is trying to achieve.

The last word in this subsection belongs to Archbishop Oscar Romero:

One of the signs of the present time is the idea of participation, the right that all persons have to participate in the construction of their own common good. For this reason, one of the most dangerous abuses of the present time is repression, the attitude that says, 'Only we can govern, no one else, get rid of them.'

Everyone can contribute much that is good, and in that way trust is achieved. The common good will not be attained by excluding people. We can't enrich the common good of our country by driving out those we don't care for. We have to try to bring out all that is good in each person and try to develop an atmosphere of trust, not with physical force, as though dealing with irrational beings, but with a moral force that draws out the good that is in everyone...

Thus, with all contributing their own interior life, their own responsibility, their own way of being, all can build the beautiful structure of the common good, the good that we construct together and that creates conditions of kindness, of trust, of freedom, of peace.

¹¹⁷ Gandhi writes extensively about the importance of trust for *satyagraha*. See *The Essential Gandhi*, 182–83, 221–22, 317; *Non-violent Resistance*, 193–4.

Then we can, all of us together, build the republic — *the res publica*, the public concern — what belongs to all of us and what we all have the duty of building.¹¹⁸

IV.D. Not against People, but against Systems

Nonviolent direct action relies on the distinction between injustice and unjust people. Though we have been speaking of “opponents,” these are people who oppose the movement; nonviolent actionists do not understand themselves to be opposed to anyone.¹¹⁹ Gandhi writes, “My non-cooperation is non-cooperation with evil, not with the evil-doer... My non-cooperation is with methods and systems, never with men.”¹²⁰ King writes similarly that in nonviolent action, it is crucial that “one seeks to defeat the unjust system, rather than individuals who are caught in that system. And that one goes on believing that somehow this is the important thing, to get rid of the evil system and not the individual who happens to be misguided, who appears to be misled, who was taught wrong. The thing to do is to get rid of the system and thereby create a moral balance within society.”¹²¹

This is a subtle but important distinction. It is the difference between antagonism (a zero-sum “us versus them” struggle) and agonism (a non-zero-sum struggle, in which victories for one group are not necessarily defeats for others). Opting for an agonistic framework, as King, Gandhi, Tutu, Deming, Esquivel, Dellinger, and others do, is not naïveté, nor is it an

¹¹⁸ Oscar Romero, *The Violence of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 3.

¹¹⁹ Gandhi, *Non-violent Resistance*, 93. Cf. 202, “Whilst I am impatient to break the British bondage, I am no enemy of Britain.”

¹²⁰ Quoted in Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 707. Cf. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 254; *Non-violent Resistance*, 77–81, 87, 238. Cf. Dellinger, *Revolutionary Nonviolence*, 19–20, 327.

¹²¹ *A Testament of Hope*, 47. Cf. 8, “A third characteristic of this method is that the attack is directed against forces of evil rather than against persons who are caught in those forces. It is evil we are seeking to defeat, not the persons victimized by evil. Those of us who struggle against racial injustice must come to see that the basic tension is not between races. As I like to say to the people in Montgomery, Alabama: ‘The tension in this city is not between white people and Negro people. The tension is at bottom between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. And if there is a victory it will be a victory not merely for 50,000 Negroes, but a victory for justice and the forces of light. We are out to defeat injustice and not white persons who may happen to be unjust.’” King does at times use the phrase “the white man” to refer to opponents of civil rights, but clarifies his meaning in *Trumpet of Conscience*, 9.

abandonment of controversial commitments in a rush to find common ground. Nonviolent direct action is still a struggle, and it will elicit opposition and often lead to negative consequences in addition to positive ones. But framing one's efforts in this way has three implications.

First, framing the conflict this way makes it more likely for activists to win converts and concessions from those who might otherwise be part of the opposition. Taking a stand for any cause is liable to alienate people, but to the extent that activists can minimize this alienation by the words and methods they use, they will be more capable of building a broad base of support (or at least, a broad base of not-opposition).¹²² Treating people not as enemies but as people caught in an unjust system—even if one adds that they are complicit in this system or that they defend it—keeps open the possibility of drawing them into the process of criticizing and reforming or removing the system. There is thus an invitational dimension of criticism when framed in an agonistic way. As King writes, “If we respect those who oppose us, they may achieve a new understanding of the human relations involved.”¹²³ If we treat people as though they were the problem, we have no chance of convincing them to help us find a solution. If we educate people to see a problem in a new way, even if it is a problem from which they benefit and to which they have been contributing, we might gain their cooperation.

¹²² This is an intuitive point, but an example might be helpful. If an activist told me they were for racial equity but that the struggle for racial equity will involve some immediate negative consequences for white people, I (a white person) would be inclined to listen to them and consider where I might agree and how I might help. If, however, an activist told me they resented white people and wanted negative consequences to happen to them, I would probably get defensive and argumentative, even if the projected consequences were the same as in the first case.

¹²³ *A Testament of Hope*, 77. Gandhi makes the same point; Bharatan Kumarappa summarizes his views, “Satyagraha may take the form of non-cooperation. When it does, it is not non-cooperation with the evildoer but with his evil deed. This is an important distinction. The satyagrahi cooperates with the evildoer in what is good, for he has no hatred for him. On the contrary, he has friendship for him. Through cooperating with him in what is not evil, the satyagrahi wins him over from evil.” In “Introduction” to Mohandas Gandhi, *Non-violent Resistance*, iv. Cf. Dellinger, *Revolutionary Nonviolence*, 242–44.

Second, and related, by making the distinction between a person and the role that person plays in an unjust system, activists can help their audiences detach their identities from their unjust actions. Johan Galtung calls this “decoupling.”¹²⁴ Consistently making and acting on the distinction between a person and their actions encourages them to make the same distinction, thereby making it easier for them to change their actions without feeling like they are losing their identities.¹²⁵ By abandoning the rhetoric of resentment, activists open up greater possibilities for transformation. This is not, it should be reiterated, retreating from the struggle or from honesty about the situation. Deming writes that nonviolent activists are continually “naming behavior that is oppressive, naming abuse of power, that is held unfairly and must be destroyed, but naming no *person* one whom we are willing to destroy. If we can destroy a man’s power to tyrannize, there is no need, of course, to destroy the man himself.”¹²⁶ The ultimate goal is to transform life-denying systems into life-affirming systems. Pursuing this goal in a way that makes it possible for opponents to redeem themselves is just as radical and just as honest as efforts that vilify specific enemies.¹²⁷ It is not, to borrow language from Civility advocates,

¹²⁴ Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense*, 108. George Lakey writes, “Attitude change seems to be most easily induced when criticism of the attitude does not mean criticism of the holder of the attitude. Separation of the issue from the opponent is difficult in any conflict situation; the nonviolent actor must take special pains to make the distinction clear.” *The Sociological Mechanisms of Non-violent Action* (Oakville, Ontario: Peace Research Institute, 1968), 24.

¹²⁵ Individuals’ sense of identity is a major factor in conflict. See John Paul Lederach, *Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003), 55.

¹²⁶ *We Are All Part of One Another*, 271.

¹²⁷ Dellinger, for example, relies on this distinction while advocating revolutionary social change. He writes, “*The enemy is every institution which denies full social and economic equality to anyone. The enemy is personal indifference to the consequences of acts performed by the institutions of which we are a part...* The war for total brotherhood must be a nonviolent war carried on by methods worthy of the ideals we seek to serve... We must fight against institutions but not against people. / There must be strikes, sabotage, and seizure of public property now being held by private owners. There must be civil disobedience of laws which are contrary to human welfare. But there must also be an uncompromising practice of treating everyone, including the worst of our opponents, with all the respect and decency that he merits as a fellow human being. We must respect the owners, policemen, conservatives and strike-breakers for what they are—potentially decent people who have been conditioned by a sick society into playing anti-social roles, the basic inhumanity of which they do not understand.

This is a diseased world in which it is impossible for anyone to be fully human. One way or another, everyone who lives in the modern world is sick or maladjusted... The only way we can begin to break the vicious circle of blindness, hatred, and inequality is to combine an uncompromising war upon evil institutions with an unending

“fighting with one hand tied behind your back,” nor is it shying away from the truth. It is rather expressing the truth in a way that makes conflict transformation and social change possible rather than expressing it in a way that drives conflicting parties further into tribalism and defensiveness.

Third, this distinction allows for the expression of anger in a constructive way. Nonviolent direct action dramatizes injustice, and a key part of this is the expression of emotion. To those who say anger should play no part in activism, Malcolm X raises a good objection: “When a man is hanging on a tree and he cries out, should he cry out unemotionally? When a man is sitting on a hot stove and he tells you how he feels to be there, is he supposed to speak without emotions?”¹²⁸ Though the theorist-practitioners discussed in this chapter are not always consistent or in agreement on this point, I argue that nonviolent direct action embraces constructive expressions of anger. Anger becomes constructive when it is directed at the injustices, illusions, and structures that prevent people from flourishing. Anger becomes destructive when it is directed at people in a way that essentializes them.

Gandhi and King talk about channeling and directing anger into constructive actions that are healthier for the activist and more transformative for the opponent. King writes,

Nonviolent resistance also provides a creative force through which men can channelize their discontent. It does not require that they abandon their discontent. This discontent is sound and healthy. Nonviolence saves it from degenerating into morbid bitterness and hatred. Hate is always tragic. It is as injurious to the hater as it is to the hated. It distorts the personality and scars the soul. Psychiatrists are telling us now that many of the inner conflicts and strange things that happen in the subconscious are rooted in hate. So they are now saying ‘Love or perish.’ This is the beauty of nonviolence. It says you can struggle without hating; you can fight war without violence.¹²⁹

kindness and love of every individual—including the individuals who defend existing institutions.” *Revolutionary Nonviolence*, 19–20; cf. 327.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Cone, *Martin and Malcolm in America*, 306.

¹²⁹ *A Testament of Hope*, 102–3. Cf. 164, 595.

Gandhi likewise writes that rage at tyranny and colonialism is natural and understandable, and that “Civil disobedience is a sovereign method of transmitting this life-destroying latent energy into disciplined life-saving energy whose use ensures absolute success.”¹³⁰ To explore the psychological and spiritual dimensions of these remarks would be beyond the scope of this chapter. I will simply say that if nonviolence demanded that activists repress their anger, this would either (A) make nonviolence impossible, because humans are deeply emotional creatures and cannot remain dispassionate when confronted with injustice, or (B) take away the wellspring of motivation to persevere in the struggle against injustice.¹³¹ This distinction between systems and people provides a way for activists to express their anger at injustice (and use it to fuel constructive, disruptive social actions) without having this anger devolve into hatred. As we will discuss in the next subsection, this hatred plants the seeds for future resentment and oppression, perpetuating the very injustice activists seek to challenge. When one’s ultimate goal is to break the cycle of violence and counter-violence, agonism provides a way for groups to express their anger and confront injustice in a way does not ironically perpetuate this cycle.¹³²

IV.E. Not Just Changing “Them,” but Changing Ourselves

Since the struggle is framed as between justice and injustice rather than between a virtuous “us” and an oppressive “them,” this has implications not only for how activists view opponents but also how they view themselves. Systems of oppression corrupt and dehumanize all

¹³⁰ *Non-Violent Resistance*, 239. Cf. *The Essential Gandhi*, xxii, 133–34.

¹³¹ *A Testament of Hope*, 297.

¹³² While resentment and destructive anger can help one build power, even enough to win proximate ends like an electoral victory, it is not conducive to the beloved community. King writes, “Are we seeking power for power’s sake? Or are we seeking to make the world and our nation better places to live. If we seek the latter, violence can never provide the answer. The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it... violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence only multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.” *A Testament of Hope*, 594.

who have been involved in them, even those actively struggling to end them. Gandhi and King insist, then, that in order for justice to triumph over injustice, it is not only those in power who need to change but also the disempowered. King writes, “Only a refusal to hate or kill can put an end to the chain of violence in the world and lead us toward a community where men can live together without fear. Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.”¹³³ Put differently, activist groups are not only seeking to change the minds of onlookers and opponents, but to change their own minds as well, to transform their attitudes and actions to be more consistent with life in the beloved community. In this final subsection, we will discuss the nature of this transformation and the role dialogue plays in it.

As previously discussed, one argument many make for the “violent means will yield violent ends” notion is that the use of violence in a struggle for independence, say, will habituate the revolutionary group to using violence, and after they take power they will continue to be repressive, possibly just as repressive as those they rebelled against. Gandhi was very concerned about this danger, writing, “Let there be no matter of doubt that *swaraj* [self-rule] established by nonviolent means will be different in kind from the *swaraj* that can be established by violent rebellion”¹³⁴ and simply, “Violent revolution will bring violent *swaraj*.”¹³⁵ Gandhi distinguished *swaraj* (and later *purna swaraj* or “complete self-rule”) from independence, noting that independence is the mere lack of colonial rule whereas *swaraj* is the presence of character

¹³³ *A Testament of Hope*, 58.

¹³⁴ Mohandas Gandhi, *Young India*, March 2, 1922, 130.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Nagler, *The Search for a Nonviolent Future*, 94. Gandhi also writes, “If the practice of seeking justice through murders is established among us, we will start murdering the other for what we believe to be justice.” Quoted in Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi*, 326.

qualities and relational patterns that empower a group of people to truly rule themselves.¹³⁶ Independence from Britain was for Gandhi a proximate end in the pursuit of *swaraj*. One iconic part of the pursuit of *swaraj* was *swadeshi*, the boycott of foreign cloth and other goods. Gandhi argued that India needed to become self-reliant rather than have a mindset of subservience and dependency, and thus relying on Indian cloth rather than imported cloth was as much self-rhetoric as it was an economic tactic. The spinning wheel (now on India's flag) symbolized for Gandhi the move from a colonized mindset to autonomy.¹³⁷ The action of spinning your own cloth sends an implicit message—not only to others but to yourself—that you are capable of taking care of yourself, that local solutions can be found to address local needs. By spinning, Indians could convince themselves of something they only half-believed: that they are capable of self-government. Gandhi thought the achievement of Indian independence without this corresponding belief would result in a collapse into dependency.

For Gandhi, *satyagraha* is also a kind of self-rhetoric, instilling in oneself through action the beliefs and character traits necessary for living into a better society. By listening to others with respect, we convince ourselves that all people deserve to be heard and respected. By striving for our proximate ends nonviolently, we foster within ourselves the self-confidence, humility, commitment to cooperation, willingness to suffer for our convictions, and devotion to the truth necessary for self-government in the *sarvodaya* society. Achieving independence without transformation, Gandhi warned, would simply be trading one repressive hierarchy for another. He insists that if an activist group adopts the unjust opponents' practices in order to triumph over that opponent, activists will unwittingly adopt corresponding beliefs and habits

¹³⁶ For a more in-depth discussion, see Amulya Ranjan Mohapatra, *Swaraj: A Multi-Dimensional Concept* (New Delhi: Readworthy, 2009), 17–32.

¹³⁷ There are close resonances between Gandhi's account of *swaraj* and virtue theory, which I do not explore here.

which will be difficult to shed after proximate victory has been achieved.¹³⁸ The more we betray our commitments in the pursuit of victory, the more we become the sort of people who will not uphold these commitments once we have won. But the more we live out these commitments in the struggle, the more we reaffirm and re-establish these commitments within ourselves.

Similarly, King writes that nonviolent direct action “will help us to enter the new age with the proper attitude,” and adds:

As I have said in so many instances, it is not enough to struggle for the new society. We must make sure that we make the psychological adjustment required to live in that new society. This is true of white people, and it is true of Negro people. Psychological adjustments will save white people from going into the new age with old vestiges of prejudice and attitudes of white supremacy. It will save the Negro from seeking to substitute one tyranny for another... Black supremacy is as dangerous as white supremacy, and God is not interested merely in the freedom of black men and brown men and yellow men. God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race and in the creation of a society where all men can live together as brothers, where every man will respect the dignity and the worth of human personality.¹³⁹

In other words, if activists are struggling for the establishment of the beloved community, they must not only resist those forces outside themselves that stand in the way, but also the internalized self-judgments, illusions, prejudices, antagonistic tendencies, and bitterness within. To paraphrase Solzhenitsyn, the line between the beloved community and the unjust system runs through the heart of every person.

This way of framing the struggle has a number of implications. First, if activists remember this and exhibit it in their words and actions, this counteracts the natural drift toward self-righteousness and judgmentalism. Second, and related, it lowers the barrier for entry for people interested in joining in the struggle. Onlookers who are not entirely convinced of a

¹³⁸ I already discussed the mimetic and cyclical nature of violence in chapter 2.

¹³⁹ *A Testament of Hope*, 215. Cf. 25, 487, 627.

particular position or not sure they have the dedication to persevere in the struggle are more likely to get involved if activists express an expectation to be changed in the struggle than if activists exhibit smug certitude and moral superiority.

Third, this framework collapses the dichotomy between personal development and social change. If the struggle is against the illusions and prejudices that sustain an unjust social order, then exorcising these illusions and prejudices from one's own psyche is itself part of the desired change. For this reason, Gandhi writes, "The attempt made to win *swaraj* is *swaraj* itself."¹⁴⁰ For Indians to recognize and assert their own dignity within a racist and dehumanizing social system is not just a necessary step toward the achievement of freedom but a realization of freedom. Since the real enemy is the illusions, not the opponents, a small victory is achieved whenever an oppressed person lives into their own self-worth. This means that personal conversations, education, and the arts are not sites of propaganda which instrumentally mobilize people for the real struggle. These are themselves sites of struggle, opportunities for justice to triumph over injustice and truth to triumph over falsehood.

The social change nonviolent direct action brings about involves personal changes in the activists themselves and the ways they interact with others.¹⁴¹ Thus, the "qualitative change in our souls" King advocates is neither peripheral to nor prerequisite to the building of the beloved community. This community comes into being, in momentary but significant ways, in and through acts of simultaneous compassion and resistance. In this way, we can understand King's

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Galtung, *The Way is the Goal*, 189. Gandhi writes elsewhere that *satyagraha* "is its own end." *Non-violent Resistance*, 202. Cf. Nojeim, *Gandhi and King*, 101.

¹⁴¹ King writes, "I plan to stand by nonviolence because I have found it to be a philosophy of life that regulates not only my dealings in the struggle for justice but also my dealings with people, with my own self." *A Testament of Hope*, 69.

point that “peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek but a means by which we arrive at that goal.”¹⁴²

Since the unjust system divides people from one another, suppressing the truth of human dignity and interrelatedness, nonviolent actions undertaken to challenge this system have both *instrumental power* to change the institutional and legal manifestations of injustice and *psychological power* to dispel the illusions that keep people trapped in cycles of violence and self-deception. Nonviolent activists are striving for a positive peace that they themselves are not entirely prepared for, but the means they use prepare them to live in this new reality as well as giving their interlocutors glimpses of a better world.¹⁴³

IV.F. Not Imposing a New Arrangement, but Finding a Synthesis

At this point, we should consider two objections. First, given that the actual end result of a struggle depends as much if not more on opponents’ responses as on the means activists use, declarations like Gandhi’s “As the means, so the end” seem to neglect opponents’ freedom to respond. In a closed system (like an ideal scientific laboratory), certain causal factors inevitably lead to certain effects. But in an open system like society, opponents are free to respond in ways at variance with what even the most refined theory of nonviolent direct action predicts.¹⁴⁴ A second objection is that visions of a better society, like the beloved community, are somewhat vague and indeterminate, and thus harder to strategically work toward than more concrete

¹⁴² *A Testament of Hope*, 627. This claim is echoed in A.J. Muste’s famous declaration that “There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.”

¹⁴³ Deming writes that nonviolent direct action “contains within it the greatest possibilities for turning minds around, for changing all who are involved in it in ways that prepare us for the new society; or, more precisely, ways that prepare that new society *in us*. In *all* of us. Even those with whom we struggle and whose power we take away. They too—though in altered status—will be part of what is new.” *We Cannot Live without Our Lives*, 13.

¹⁴⁴ Arne Naess makes an objection similar to this against strong versions of the means-ends principle. See *Gandhi and Group Conflict*, 61–64.

proximate ends. We do not have a perfectly clear picture of what the beloved community looks like, and thus can rarely be certain whether an event is evidence of progress toward it.

Both objections serve as reminders for nonviolent activists to moderate their claims, certainly, but I will argue in this last section that these objections actually show the strength of nonviolent direct action.

To make this point, I will rely on Joan Bondurant's 1965 *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conduct*, one of the most influential and still valuable English-language analyses of Gandhi's *satyagraha*. "The technique to which Gandhi gave the name 'satyagraha,'" the book begins, "is at once a mode of action and a method of inquiry. It goes well beyond procedure, or tactic, to define the process for involvement of self and engagement with others in an endeavor essentially creative and necessarily constructive."¹⁴⁵ According to Bondurant, the creative, constructive, inquisitive dimension of *satyagraha* is as important as the nonviolent resistance dimension. The goal of *satyagraha* is to discover something not yet fully known and to build something not yet in existence.

For a *satyagrahi*, one's ends transcend themselves. This is a tricky point to illustrate, but the clearest way—indeed, Gandhi's way—is to think about *truth*. We can think we know what is true while still striving for the truth. We can cling to the truth we apprehend, and at the same time recognize that we do not have a clear, complete, and flawless comprehension of the truth. Similarly, in nonviolent direct action, activists act on their understanding of the beloved community, letting this this end guide their choice of means. All the while, though, activists

¹⁴⁵ Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, v. Bondurant notes that her book is not a summary of Gandhi's philosophy but is rather a Gandhian philosophy (*Conquest of Violence*, xiv). The book is both faithful to Gandhian thought and an innovative contribution in its own right.

acknowledge that the better society they envision is not the actual ideal; their understanding is still limited. In order to pursue the beloved community with integrity, activists may need to revise their understanding of the beloved community over and over again.¹⁴⁶ The beloved community is always something we discover and create, not merely something we possess and impose.

Hence, Gandhi labeled his campaigns “experiments with truth,”¹⁴⁷ foregrounding the element of discovery that accompanies a steadfast commitment to nonviolence. This attitude of discovery is not just the virtue of intellectual humility, it stems from the end activists are pursuing, an end that surpasses their own ability to fully comprehend it. Nonviolent activists expect to have blind spots, misperceptions, and errors in judgment—and invite others to point these out—not because of their own lack of confidence but because the end they strive for transcends their limited perspectives. Activists thus seek both to persuade and be persuaded, including in interactions with opponents. As King writes, “Here is the true meaning and value of compassion and nonviolence—when it helps us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to know of his assessment of ourselves. For from his view we may indeed see the

¹⁴⁶ Bondurant writes, “In the operation of satyagraha, where the protagonist is prepared to revise his opinion and his goal if he is persuaded of their falsity, there is little room for static ends. Perhaps the most characteristic quality of satyagraha is the flexibility in ends which an emphasis on means implies. This is not to suggest that a satyagrahi is a weak or easy opponent. He may persist to the death without relaxing his hold on the original position which he took to be the truth. But, significantly, he may easily be won over. His dogma—if such a thing is to be alleged of him—lies in adherence to a means, to a technique, which has, as we have seen, specific moral elements at its base. But what action in these terms may mean—what it may lead to as a social, or political, or individual end—is highly unpredictable.” *Conquest of Violence*, 34. Cf. 196–97, 222. Cf. Pelton, *The Psychology of Nonviolence*, 16–17; Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action*, 321–26.

¹⁴⁷ See the subtitle of Gandhi’s *Autobiography*. There are close parallels between Gandhi’s understanding of truth and pragmatist theories of truth (which Bondurant hints at by citing Hook and Dewey), but I will not explore these parallels here.

basic weakness of our own condition, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition.”¹⁴⁸

As we have discussed, the goal of nonviolent struggle is the realization of a social order that takes into consideration the needs and concerns of all involved. This means the ultimate end is never entirely the same as what an activist envisions it to be going into the struggle; activists expect to learn and grow by listening to the voices of other parties in the conflict. Activists seek a synthesis of the best of their own limited perspective with the best of other parties’ limited perspectives. Bondurant calls this “the Gandhian dialectic.”¹⁴⁹ She writes,

The *satyagrahi* must recognize that... his immediate goal is not the triumph of his substantial side in the struggle—but, rather, the synthesis of the two opposing claims. He does, then, all he can to persuade the opponent of the correctness of his own position, but, while he carries on his own persuasive activity, he allows the opponent every opportunity and, indeed, invites him to demonstrate the correctness of his (the opponent’s) position and to dissuade him of his own position... This may, of course, be achieved totally or partially; the *satyagrahi* may be persuaded to abandon certain parts of his original position. He recognizes, and attempts to demonstrate to his opponent that he recognizes, the desirability of a resulting synthesis, and that he is not seeking a one-sided triumph. His effort is to allow for the emergence of the best restructuring of the situation. He seeks a victory, not over the opponent, but over the situation in the best (in the sense of the total human needs of the situation) synthesis possible.¹⁵⁰

Since the ultimate goal is to address “the total human needs of the situation,” and this includes the needs and concerns central to opponents’ viewpoints, the nonviolent activist listens to the opponent and tries to find a solution that addresses the concerns of all involved. This pursuit of a

¹⁴⁸ *A Testament of Hope*, 638. Gandhi writes, “A devotee of Truth... must always hold himself open to correction, and whenever he discovers himself to be wrong he must confess it at all costs and atone for it.” *Autobiography*, 322.

¹⁴⁹ *Conquest of Violence*, 189–99.

¹⁵⁰ *Conquest of Violence*, 196. Bondurant’s notion of the Gandhian dialectic parallels Johan Galtung’s work on “transcending” conflicts and anticipates later work on conflict transformation. She distinguishes dialectic from compromise; compromise abandons something desired whereas dialectic synthesis imagines a new way of ordering things that meets both the needs of all parties.

synthesis is concerned speech—the *satyagrahi* “attempts to demonstrate to his opponent” —and it not only stated but expressed in the activity of dialogue.

In dialogue and dialogical action, activists do not simply say they have their opponents’ own best interests in mind, they show this commitment by paying attention to the voice of the opponent and reflecting back to the opponent an understanding of the needs and concerns that motivate their position. The very act of taking opponents’ voices seriously—even while one criticizes opponents’ conclusions and resists the injustice opponents permit—is expressive. It conveys the implicit message that opponents’ insights and concerns are not and will not be excluded in the activists’ pursuit of their ends. It conveys the message that the beloved community for which the activist strives has room for the opponent’s limited perspective on the truth, even if the activist (with their own limited perspective on the truth) at present does not recognize how. The opponent can be, and in some sense already is, a partner in the creation of the beloved community.¹⁵¹

As we saw with Kierkegaard in chapter 4, the goal of nonviolent persuasion is out-narration: uncovering a more comprehensive understanding of the truth, constructing a more integrated society, and with words and actions showing all parties a better way that they can at least begin to understand and appreciate.¹⁵² This, in conclusion, is why Bondurant calls nonviolent direct action is “end-revealing”: the means of nonviolent struggle reveal to opponents, to onlookers, and to activists themselves an ultimate end worth struggling for.

¹⁵¹ Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action*, 143.

¹⁵² A.J. Muste writes, “You always assume there is some element of truth in the position of the other person, and you respect your opponent for hanging on to an idea as long as he believes it to be true. On the other hand, you must try very hard to see what truth actually does exist in his idea, and seize on it to make hm realize what you consider to be a larger truth.” He identifies this as “fundamental in the nonviolent approach to life.” *The Essays of A.J. Muste*, xii.

6. Sharing the Good News: Integral Communication and Christian Theology

After Martin Luther King Jr.'s Montgomery home was bombed in 1956, presumably by white segregationists, a crowd of angry King supporters, some armed, gathered around the remains. King later recounts that after reminding the crowd of his commitment to Christian nonviolence, "I then urged them to leave peacefully. 'We must love our white brothers,' I said, 'no matter what they do to us. *We must make them know that we love them.* Jesus still cries out in words that echo across the centuries: "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that despitefully use you." This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love."¹ For King, to love your enemies includes trying to show them, in a way they can be reasonably expected to understand, that you love them. In the language of this dissertation, enemy-love is concerned speech. For King, it is not enough to be internally motivated by good will or to outwardly abstain from violence; enemy-love involves a union of inner and outer that manifests in communication.

In this final chapter, I will use ICC to outline an approach for Christian communication in social conflict. Since we have already discussed how Kierkegaard, King, and other Christian theologians use ICC, this chapter serves to synthesize many of the points made in previous chapters. This chapter is similar in structure to the analyses of Freire, Campbell, Kierkegaard, and the nonviolent direct action tradition in chapters 3–5. Readers who are not in any way committed to Christianity can still read this chapter as an illustration and elaboration of ICC as a method of criticism, and can reason analogically from the arguments in this chapter to their own

¹ Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride toward Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 137–38. Emphasis mine.

specific ends and situations. This chapter is different, however, in that it is a work of constructive theology. Rather than just analyzing the arguments of one thinker or even a set of theorist-practitioners, I am making normative claims about what Christians' ultimate ends are and how Christians can pursue these ends in an integral way. I make these claims in conversation with a number of Christian theologians, but I do not always explain the choice of interlocutors or defend the orthodoxy of the ideas I draw upon. The Christian theology articulated in this chapter is my own, though I intend it to be in congruity with the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition that stretches from Michael Sattler and Menno Simons to Peter Dula and Malinda Elizabeth Berry.

One member of that tradition, John D. Roth, states clearly the claim I defend in this chapter: "The method of proclaiming the gospel has to be consistent with the noncoercive substance of the message that we are proclaiming. Thus, true Christian witness can never proceed as an argument designed to bully the listener into a corner with clever arguments or overpowering rhetoric. Instead, Christian witness always proceeds as an invitation."² Roth's observation is a good example of ICC, but he does not elaborate on it in any depth, nor does he explain whether and how this invitational approach to Christian communication can incorporate criticism and prophetic protest. This chapter is an attempt to fill those gaps, and to show how the ultimate end of Christian witness provides normative guidance for Christian engagement in social conflict.

As discussed in the introduction, it is typical for Christians to contrast dialogue with proclamation. Those who advocate a more open, pluralistic vision of religion tend to favor dialogue, whereas those who advocate a more doctrinal, evangelistic vision of Christianity tend

² John D. Roth, *Beliefs*, 31.

to favor proclamation, but both groups draw on the same distinction. I argue that this distinction is misleading, and that the normative shape of Christian witness is simultaneously dialogue and proclamation.

Explicitly Christian reflection on the ethics of communication tends to share the same tensions as the field more broadly. In chapter 1, we saw that appeals to religion are insufficient to resolve the debate between Civility and Victory because Civility focuses on the *practices* enjoined in religious teachings and Victory focuses on the ethical *values* found in religious teachings. The New Testament contains rule-like prescriptions for communicative behavior and also an ethical obligation to struggle for particular social causes.³ So the concerns of the Civility and Victory voices find expression in the New Testament, even though the Jesus of the Gospels is neither an Alinskian realistic radical nor a Carterian civilized citizen. This chapter is an attempt to reconcile these two strands of Christian ethical reasoning and develop a communication ethic attentive to the means and the ends of Christian witness.

In chapters 1–2, we saw that it is difficult to find a cross-contextual communication ethic. There are drawbacks that prevent the Civility, Victory, and Open-mindedness perspectives from guiding communication across the spectrum of interpersonal interactions. The ethical logic that seems appropriate in one context seems inappropriate in another, and this can often lead to self-deception and an incoherent communication ethic. In this chapter, I argue that using ICC to reflect on the ultimate ends of Christian witness provides the basis for a cross-contextual communication ethic. Since witnessing to the good news of Jesus is the ultimate end of all Christian communication, ICC offers Christians guidance for communication in all situations.

³ For the former, see Matthew 5, 7; Ephesians 4; Colossians 3; Titus 3; and James 1. For the latter, see Matthew 25; Luke 6; James 1–2; I John 3; and the many passages that echo the social ethics of the Old Testament prophets.

Exploring in detail what this ethic looks like in different contexts would take its own book-length manuscript, so for this chapter I will focus specifically on social conflicts like those that constitute the American “culture war.”⁴

I. “You Will Be My Witnesses”⁵: The Ultimate End of Christian Ethics

As we discussed in chapter 3, communication is not one activity among others that humans do; rather, communication is a way of looking at all of human activity. The communicative dimension of human activity is particularly important for one strand of thought in Christian ethics, which I will here call “witness ethics.” At least as far back as the New Testament, “witness” has been a central category of Christian ethical reflection.⁶ More recently, influential theologians including Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Stanley Hauerwas have given witness a prominent place in their ethical writings.⁷ Karl Barth defines witness as “pointing in a specific direction beyond the self and on to another,”⁸ and thus *Christian witness*

⁴ “Love your enemies” has often been described as an ethic for interpersonal relationships, not applicable to large-scale political conflicts. I find this puzzling, because it seems to me readily applicable to large-scale conflicts but difficult and painful to apply to relationships broken by manipulation and abuse. There is a relevant distinction between the opponent-enemy in a social conflict and the offender-enemy who has directly harmed another person. The arguments of this chapter apply directly to the former, and only indirectly—with many qualifications about boundaries and power dynamics—to the latter.

⁵ Acts 1:8.

⁶ On the category of “witness” in the book of Acts, see Celia I. Wolff, “Witness Acts” (ThD diss., Duke University, 2018).

⁷ See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936–1969); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995); Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) and *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001). For helpful secondary sources on communication and witness in these authors, see David Haddorff, *Christian Ethics as Witness: Barth’s Ethics for a World at Risk* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010); Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth’s Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004); Donald E. Phillips, *Karl Barth’s Philosophy of Communication* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1981); Stephen H. Webb, *Re-figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991); Jennifer McBride, *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Ronald Arnett, *Dialogic Confession: Bonhoeffer’s Rhetoric of Responsibility* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois, 2005); Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004); Russell Johnson, “Stanley Hauerwas” in *An Encyclopedia of Communication Ethics*, 207–11.

⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II*, quoted in Haddorff, *Christian Ethics as Witness*, 219.

includes actions in which one recognizes God’s work in and for the world and testifies to it, pointing beyond the self to what God has done and is doing in creation. This includes explicit reference to divine action, but also actions that reflect God, the self, and the world as revealed through Christ. As Cardinal Suhard writes, “To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda nor even stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one’s life would not make sense if God did not exist.”⁹ According to this way of thinking about Christian ethics, this idea of witness offers a lens to look at Christian ethics as a whole.¹⁰ In the language of this dissertation, these theologians maintain that the ultimate end of the Christian life is witness.¹¹

To explain how witness plays a central role in Christian ethics, we will first need to discuss—all too briefly—the content of the Christian message. This message is complex, but I will focus only on the elements of it that are immediately relevant to the argument of this chapter.¹² The rest of this section is not an attempt to say anything theologically new, but to lay out the premises for the argument that follows.

According to Christian theology, all people are created in the image of God, who calls each one of us “very good.”¹³ Humans were created to be in free, loving relationships with God

⁹ Emmanuel Suhard, quoted in Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 5n4.

¹⁰ By arguing communication offers us a perspective to theorize Christian ethics as a whole, I am not thereby excluding other forms of moral and theological reasoning. My focus is primarily on social ethics, broadly considered; there are many pertinent ethical issues for which attending to the communicative dimension does not bring clarity, or does so at most indirectly. For example, whatever one decides about the morality of eating animals, I doubt it helps to ask about the implicit messages this act conveys to salmon.

¹¹ “Ultimate end” understandably suggests eschatology, but here as in chapter 5 by “ultimate end” I mean overarching goal more so than final terminus.

¹² To that end, I focus primarily on the social aspects of the gospel more so than the individual aspects, and on the cognitive and imaginative aspects more so than the embodied or ontological aspects.

¹³ Some of the claims in this paragraph are contentious among Christian theologians, but this is meant to be an ecumenical statement of Christian convictions that will serve as premises for the argument that follows. This paragraph is congruous with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Apostles’ Creed, the Schleithem Confession (1527), the Richmond Declaration (1887), the Confession of 1967, the United Methodist Confession of Faith (1968),

and one another. All people have sinned, which involves living into a less-than-fully-true narrative about ourselves, the world, and God. Sin is choosing to act on a lie rather than striving for the truth. Effects of sin include division between people, alienation from God, and the fear that comes from trying to prove to ourselves and others that we have value. Because of this division, alienation, and fear, humans vilify and exploit one another and construct shared myths and illusions to justify these practices. Thus, lies give rise to fear, which drives us deeper into falsehood, and so on, keeping us trapped in cycles of untruth. God does not leave humans alone in their sin, but works actively to reconcile us to one another and to Godself. The culminating event of this work is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, through whom God brings all humanity back into free, loving relationships with God and with one another. Jesus reveals definitively that humanity is created good, broken by sin, and restored by grace which is not earned but is given by God. This revelation calls for a social order, called “The Kingdom of God,” in which people interact not out of fear or hostility but out of a mutual recognition of the image of God in one another and in themselves.¹⁴ In this social order, God is active through the Holy Spirit challenging the myths, prejudices, and illusions that get in the way of people apprehending the good news of divine grace for all. No person apprehends the truth of divine grace once and for all; rather people can come to recognize this truth more fully through practices of prayer, communion, worship, reflection, and compassionate action.

The basis for Christian ethics is not an abstract principle or prudential calculus, but a response to something God has done and is doing in the world. This means that the principal category for Christian ethics is witness. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the decisive

the “Credo of the People of God” in *Solemni Hac Liturgia* (1968), the “Statement of Beliefs of the North American Baptists” (1982), and “To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism” (2014).

¹⁴ Though I do not discuss it here, it needs to be mentioned that the actions characteristic of the Kingdom of God on earth are a foretaste and inbreaking of the eschatological Kingdom of God.

event of God's work redeeming a broken and sinful world. In events narrated in the Gospels, God has in some sense already brought about the liberation and reconciliation of the world. Christians are called to testify with their words and actions to what God has done. The Dutch theologian Henri Nouwen speaks for many when he writes, "Our [Christians'] action, therefore, must be understood as a discipline by which we make *visible what has already been accomplished*."¹⁵ The Christian community is not striving to achieve victory, but is rather "the expression of a victory already won."¹⁶ Christians do not fully recognize and appreciate what God has revealed and accomplished, so Christian ethics is as much about recognizing as it is about testifying. Christian ethics is thus a matter of witness in two senses of the term: witnessing as seeing and appreciating, and witnessing as testifying through words and actions.¹⁷

Nouwen maintains that the twofold life of witness serves as the basis for all of Christian social ethics. He writes,

Here we find the ground of all Christian action. As prayer leads us into the house of God and God's people, so action leads us back into the world to work there for reconciliation, unity, and peace. Once we have come to know the truth, we want to act truthfully and reveal to the world its true nature. All Christian action—whether it is visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, or working for a more just and peaceful society—is a manifestation of the human solidarity revealed to us in the house of God. It is not an anxious human effort to create a better world. It is a confident expression of the truth that in Christ, death, evil, and destruction have been overcome. It is not a fearful attempt to restore a broken order. It is a joyful assertion that in Christ all order has already been restored. It is not a nervous effort to bring divided people together, but a celebration of an already established unity. This action is not activism. An activist wants to heal, restore, redeem, and re-create, but those acting within the house of God point

¹⁵ Henri Nouwen, Donald McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion* (New York: Image Books, 1982), 122. Emphasis mine. Cf. Henri Nouwen, *Letters to Marc about Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 60–61.

¹⁶ Henri Nouwen, *Peacework: Prayer, Resistance, Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 108.

¹⁷ This is not far from the famous statement in the Westminster Shorter Catechism that the chief end of humanity is "to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

through their action to the healing, restoring, redeeming, and re-creating presence of God.¹⁸

Note some of the words Nouwen uses—manifestation, expression, assertion, celebration. These are all forms of communication. Christians are enjoined to take actions by which they learn and internalize the truth of the gospel and symbolic actions that testify to what God has revealed and accomplished. On this interpretation, which Nouwen shares with many others, the communicative dimension of human life is crucially important for Christian ethics.¹⁹

With that general overview in mind, we can turn specifically to the social dimension of the Christian message. As theologian J. Deotis Roberts summarizes it, the Christian gospel is a message of liberation and reconciliation, and always these two together.²⁰ The gospel is a message of liberation from the cycles of fear, untruth, and victimization characteristic of the sinful world. Jesus has declared that all people are free and loved by God; Christians' concrete actions for the poor, the captive, and the oppressed are responses to this once-and-for-all declaration. The message of Jesus confronts "systems of evil that dehumanize the oppressed,"²¹ quelling the fears that make us think these systems are necessary while exposing the lies that are used to rationalize them.

¹⁸ Henri Nouwen, *Lifesigns* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), 48–49. Nouwen's use of the word "activist" in this passage is unusual, and not the more general sense in which I use the word in this dissertation.

¹⁹ One implication of witness ethics is that the discipline closest to Christian ethics is not jurisprudence but rhetoric. The tradition which Don Compier terms "rhetorical theology" deserves a greater hearing in Christian social ethics than it has received thus far. For a survey, see Don H. Compier, *What Is Rhetorical Theology?: Textual Practice and Public Discourse* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1999). For one notable contribution, see David S. Cunningham, *Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

²⁰ "There can be no liberation without reconciliation and no reconciliation without liberation." J. Deotis Roberts, *A Black Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 222. Cf. J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 20, 34. By emphasizing liberation and reconciliation, Roberts does not exclude individual salvation, forgiveness, and sanctification. His goal is to counterbalance the overemphasis these have received in white American Christianity.

²¹ Roberts, *A Black Political Theology*, 136.

Humans are set free *from* what imprisons and oppresses them, but also reconciled *to* God and to one another. Roberts writes,

The gospel is the good news of God. It speaks of the fact that God, by his grace, has forgiven sin and reconciled man with God... The gospel is also good news to man in his social relations. Because of a broken relationship between man and God, there is hostility between man and man. Through God's redemptive action in Christ, the wall of partition between men has been removed. This means that the gospel which reconciles us to God also brings us together."²²

This bringing-together is not simply a matter of sentiment; it needs to be made manifest in social interactions and social structures. Writing in the context of American racism, Roberts adds,

The assertion that all are 'one in Christ Jesus' must henceforth mean that all slave-master, servant-boss, inferior-superior frames of reference between blacks and whites have been abolished. This principle must operate not merely on the spiritual level, but on the plane of human social relations as well. The slave must be set free, but the slave system must likewise be destroyed so the future will be free of human bondage.²³

The liberation and reconciliation Jesus has accomplished is, then, the founding of a new social order, the Kingdom of God, which reforms and replaces social systems fueled by exploitation and animosity.²⁴ Whatever else the Kingdom of God may be, it is a way of relating to all people that eschews violence and discrimination. It has close affinities with the idea of the beloved community, as discussed in chapter 5. In the Kingdom of God, we recognize all people as made in God's image, led astray in sin, and reconciled to God and one another by Christ. This recognition transforms the way we understand ourselves and treat one another.

²² Roberts, *A Black Political Theology*, 139. The text reads "wall of participation," which seems to be a typo (especially when compared with a similar passage on p. 221). This mention of a "wall of partition" is an allusion to Ephesians 2:14; for a commentary on the book of Ephesians in line with the arguments of this chapter, see Markus Barth, *The Broken Wall: A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Chicago: Judson Press, 1959).

²³ Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 34. Cf. *A Black Political Theology*, 140.

²⁴ Despite calling this "new," I should note that it is in continuity with Jewish traditions that predate the New Testament. See Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

Given that Christian witness is communicative, it behooves us to ask who the audiences are of these messages. The short answer is everyone. The gospel is good news for all people. A consistent theme of the New Testament, carrying forward a theme found in the Old Testament, is the expansion of God's covenant to all people. The gospel's inclusivity transgresses all boundaries drawn between insider and outsider.²⁵ As King writes, "The good news was meant for all men—for Communist and capitalist, for their children and ours, for black and for white, for revolutionary and conservative."²⁶ All people are created good, ensnared by illusions, and liberated and reconciled by God, and coming to recognize these truths about themselves brings greater freedom, meaning, and joy. In order to be faithful to the gospel, Christians cannot discriminate between audiences and decide which ones are worthy of hearing their message. By its very nature, it can never simply be good news for "us" but not for "them." Writing off a group as beyond the scope of reconciliation and unworthy of engagement is a betrayal of the universality of the Kingdom of God.²⁷ Since Christ has made us all sisters and brothers, we cannot simply disregard those with whom we are brought into contact. Reconciliation is not simply the abolition of hatred but the creation of relationships of responsibility for and accountability to one another, even and especially those from whom we have been divided.²⁸

Two clarifications are in order.

²⁵ "Insider" and "outsider" are Markus Barth's terms. In Barth's reading, the division between Jew and Gentile is emblematic of all us/them divisions overcome by Christ.

²⁶ *A Testament of Hope*, 234.

²⁷ Nouwen writes of our tendency to judge our political opponents, "In judging, we deal with our own fears by putting other people into little boxes and, in effect, declaring them dead. 'Oh, I know him,' we say. 'I know that type. He's not worth talking to.' In doing this, we take the position that new life is no longer possible in our relationships with people, we have already decided who they are. We don't want to be bothered any more. That is why Jesus says, 'Do not judge.' Labeling people prevents us from seeing them as brothers and sisters and from developing community with them." *The Road to Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 205–6.

²⁸ My argument is primarily about reconciliation between opposing sides in social conflicts. Reconciliation with individuals who have personally caused harm is a related issue, but I do not directly address it in this chapter.

First, this does not mean that each person must, in all their speech and action, be communicating to all potential audiences. This is linguistically impossible. Christians do not need to address everyone, but to be attentive to how the audiences who can hear or overhear their messages will receive these messages. We bear a responsibility to our anticipated audiences, not merely our intended audiences. Put differently, if I preach a sermon that is unintelligible to a shepherd in Nepal, there is nothing objectionable about this. But if, knowing that my words might be overheard by Catholics, I preach a sermon that my immediate audience would recognize as not stereotyping but could only be heard by Catholics as one of stereotyping and contempt, I am neglecting my Christian responsibility for my sisters and brothers.

Second, communicating the gospel in a way a certain audience can understand does not mean that audience will recognize it as good news, and it certainly does not mean they will respond well to the message. James Baldwin writes poignantly, “The truth which frees black people will also free white people, but this is a truth which white people find very difficult to swallow.”²⁹ This could be said of the gospel—it is good news for all people, but those who are more deeply invested in illusions may find it difficult to recognize as good news for themselves. This does not mean Christian communicators can simply give up on anyone who seems resistant to the message of liberation and reconciliation. But it does serve as a reminder that the work of responding to the good news is the work of the Holy Spirit within the human heart, not a direct result of Christian witness (even when this witness is integral communication).

One final component of the Christian gospel needs to be mentioned, and that is its intrinsically nonviolent character. Because Jesus has made peace between divided groups and

²⁹ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2007) 129.

forgiven the sins of the world, Christian witness is nonviolent witness.³⁰ “Love your enemies” is not an isolated command, but the heart of the Christian gospel. Christian ethics hinges on the idea that because God loved God’s enemies, we are set free to love our enemies and express this love to them in compassionate witness to the peace of Christ. Though it would be beyond the scope of this chapter to recount arguments for this, Stanley Hauerwas is right when he argues, “Nonviolence is not one among other behavioral implications that can be drawn from the gospel but is integral to the shape of Christian convictions.”³¹ In the next section, we will discuss in greater detail how nonviolence—not just refusing to kill, but the nonviolent action discussed in the previous chapter—informs Christian engagement in social conflict.

II. “Good News of Great Joy for All the People”³²: The Logic of Christian Witness

If the ultimate end for Christians in their social interactions is to witness to the truth of what God has done for the world, then which means are conducive to this end? As the passage from Nouwen quoted above suggests, a wide range of actions express implicit messages that are, even when not distinctively Christian, expressive of different facets of this truth. Sitting silently with someone who mourns expresses the message that they are not alone in their suffering. Giving to those in need expresses the message that God provides for God’s children. Resting on the Sabbath expresses the message—even if just to oneself—that one’s value is not limited to the work one does. In all of these activities, and countless more, the gospel is expressed, in small but significant pieces that point toward the whole.³³ One does not need to identify as a Christian to

³⁰ II Corinthians 5. On this point, Roberts and Nouwen agree.

³¹ Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, xvi.

³² Luke 2:10 (NRSV).

³³ Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells write, “[W]itness names the Christian hope that every action—whether for peace, for justice, for stability, for alleviating distress, for empowering the young or weak, for comforting the lonely, for showing mercy to the outcast, for offering hospitality, for making friends, or for earning a living—points to God, and invites an inquiry into the joy that inspires such actions.” From “The Gift of the Church and the Gifts God Gives It,” *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, eds. Hauerwas and Wells (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 19.

witness to the gospel (or at least a facet of the gospel), but Christians are those people who consciously make it their mission to express the complicated truth of the gospel. In any situation, the guiding question of the Christian life is, “What words and actions, in this situation, will reflect what God has done and is doing?” This will mean Christians at times will sound indistinguishable from others who do not share their Christian convictions, while at other times Christians’ witness will be unpopular, controversial, and costly even to the point of death.

As discussed in chapter 4, there are various illusions that threaten to obscure or co-opt Christian witness. For Kierkegaard, the illusions of Christendom could not simply be dismissed but had to be reckoned with in order for the truth of Christianity to be heard aright. It is not enough for the Christian communicator to have pious motives or to hold biblical positions; witnesses need to “have eyes in the back of his head with the actual appropriation of the communication.”³⁴ This includes a dialectical sensitivity to the pre-existing beliefs and commitments of one’s audiences. It is all too easy, Kierkegaard reminds us, to convey a theological vision that superficially resembles Christianity but actually leads audiences further away from an authentic encounter with the Christian gospel. As Christians seek to witness to the gospel in their pursuit of various proximate ends, illusions threaten to distort and co-opt this witness in social conflicts.

Given, then, that Christian ethics is rooted in the call to share the good news of liberation and reconciliation accomplished in and by Jesus, a message “of great joy for all the people,” how can this message be faithfully expressed in situations of social conflict? How can one express a

³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers* 1:649.

message that is critical—even prophetically critical—while faithfully presenting this gospel? This is the question that will occupy us for the rest of this chapter.

My primary interlocutors for this section are Desmond Tutu and the American Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder. Like the ideas quoted in previous chapters, Tutu’s reflections on Christian witness in social conflict are as practical as they are profound.³⁵ Yoder’s writings provide unique insights into Christian communication ethics and the connection between the ends of Christian witness and the means of criticism and dialogue.³⁶

There are good reasons to *not* treat Yoder as an authority. Yoder sexually harassed and abused dozens of women over a span of more than twenty years.³⁷ When confronted about this, he combatively asserted a theological rationalization for his sexual “experiments” and resisted efforts to call his behavior into question. It scarcely needs to be argued that Yoder’s abuse of women was not only unethical in itself but also a violation of the nonviolent Christian message found in his published works.³⁸ As I will argue in section II.E below, Yoder’s resistance to

³⁵ Witness is not the centerpiece of Tutu’s ethics, but it plays a role. He writes, for instance, “For the God we worship and adore is the One who wants us to reflect His character so that others will know what sort of God He is by seeing what kind of people we are.” *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 111.

³⁶ Dialogue is a theme that runs throughout Yoder’s work beginning with his dissertation on Swiss Anabaptists seeking dialogue with surrounding church leaders. See John Howard Yoder, *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues Between Anabaptists and Reformers* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2004). Yoder’s contributions to theology of communication have been discussed by Chris Huebner, *A Precarious Peace* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006); Gerald Mast, “The Radical Christological Rhetoric of John Howard Yoder” in *A Mind Patient and Untamed*, eds. Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2004), 39–55; and Ted Grimsrud and Christian Early, “Epilogue,” in *A Pacifist Way of Knowing: John Howard Yoder’s Nonviolent Epistemology*, eds. Grimsrud and Early (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010). I am indebted to their work in the discussion that follows.

³⁷ See Rachel Waltner Goossen, “Defanging the Beast: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89 (January, 2015): 7–80; Ruth E. Krall, “The Elephants in God’s Living Room, Vol. 3: The Mennonite Church and John Howard Yoder,” 2013, <https://ruthkrall.com/downloadable-books/volume-three-the-mennonite-church-and-john-howard-yoder-collected-essays/>.

³⁸ At the same time, the justifications Yoder offered did draw on certain themes in his ecclesiology. As Jamie Pitts writes, “Yoder used aspects of his theology to justify his actions, as he apparently told several women that he was conducting an avant-garde ecclesial experiment. Anyone familiar with Yoder’s ecclesiology will recognize these terms as central to his understanding of the church’s role in the world: the church as firstfruits, pioneer, pilot project, and creative transformer of the culture. Although Yoder’s point about the avant-garde church—it breaks with the

criticism—whether from victims, friends, or colleagues—is also a violation of his own account of Christian dialogical ethics. By making himself invulnerable to challenge, Yoder arrogated to himself a supremacy that, by his own reckoning, Christians must renounce. Accountability—even accountability to “the world”—is built into the Christian gospel. To deploy one’s power and authority—or the ethical value of one’s work—to insulate oneself from rebuke, as Yoder did and as some church leaders continue to do, is a betrayal of the gospel these leaders claim to represent.

Of the many theologians who make witness the centerpiece of their ethics, what sets Yoder apart is his emphasis on how audiences receive this witness.³⁹ For Yoder, as for Kierkegaard, Christianity is concerned truth and the Christian gospel is concerned speech. This means, once again, that whether one is actually proclaiming the gospel is neither fully dependent on the audience’s reception and response nor fully independent of it. There are people who take themselves to be proclaiming the gospel, and the explicit content of their messages is theologically sound, but close attention to the implicit messages they express in their rhetorical situation shows that they are doing something else entirely. In his scattered works, Yoder used reasoning akin to ICC to develop guidelines for integral Christian witness.⁴⁰ In the process,

world and demonstrates God’s coming reign—is theologically sound, perhaps his ability to twist that logic to deviant ends will caution his inheritors from claiming too much for the church and, especially, for themselves as church members. Perhaps we might say the church *might become* avant-garde insofar as it exhibits the integrity-in-discernment that is its calling.” *Principalities and Powers: Revising John Howard Yoder’s Sociological Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), xv. This integrity-in-discernment, I argue here, involves attending to the voices outside the church that call the church’s traditions and assumptions into question.

³⁹ Yoder’s witness ethics is stated most clearly in *For the Nations*, especially in passages like the following: “We are not called to love our enemies in order to make them our friends. We are called to act out of love for them because at the cross it has been effectively proclaimed that for all eternity they were our brothers and sisters. We are not called to make the bread of the world available to the hungry; we are called to restore the true awareness that it was always theirs. We are not called to topple the tyrants, so that it might become true that the proud fall and the haughty are destroyed. It already is true; we are called only to let that truth govern our own choice of whether to be, in our turn, tyrants claiming to be benefactors.” *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 210–11.

⁴⁰ In *Theology of Mission*, Yoder asks, “Are there some ways to communicate the Christian message that cannot possibly communicate the *Christian* message because of their very structure?” and goes on for two chapters to

Yoder collapses the apparent divide between evangelism and dialogue, arguing, “Mission and dialogue are not alternatives: each is valid only within the other, properly understood.”⁴¹ Since the Christians’ goal is not simply fidelity to the message but conveying this message in a way audiences can understand, Yoder argues that the gospel “refutes the disjunction between integrity and intelligibility; each is the other’s prerequisite.”⁴² In the rest of this chapter we will discuss and build upon his arguments to illustrate how ICC plays a pivotal role in a comprehensive Christian social ethic.

Christianity is both an existential commitment and a nonviolent way of life. Thus, many of the points already made in chapters 4 (about Kierkegaard) and 5 (about nonviolent direct action) apply either directly or indirectly to the question of Christian communication in social conflict. By way of summary and synthesis, then, the ten points made at the end of those chapters will serve as a framework for the rest of this section. In the subsections to follow, I will not so much be making new and discrete points as offering overlapping reflections on what faithful Christian witness in social conflict entails, while distinguishing the argument I am making from a range of common ideas and assumptions about communication for social change.

***II.A. Not antagonizing, but ministering;
Not zero-sum, but a corrective***

reflect on SBC and IC in the context of international missions. *Theology of Mission: A Believers Church Perspective*, eds. Gayle Gerber Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 310. Yoder also discusses the relationship between medium and message in *For the Nations*, 29, 41; “Meaning after Babble: With Jeffrey Stout beyond Relativism” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24 (1996): 135; “Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism” in *Theology without Foundations*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 83, 90; and “Clarifying the Gospel” *Builder* 23 no. 8 (August, 1973): 3.

⁴¹ John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 255.

⁴² John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation,” *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (July 1992): 295.

In chapter 4, we discussed Kierkegaard's idea of a "ministering critic," a critic who ventures courageously into the interlocutor's viewpoint and makes criticisms with the grain of the interlocutor's concerns.

An important aspect of this ministering criticism is what Yoder calls "second-mile dialogical vulnerability."⁴³ This names the effort to make one's arguments by drawing primarily on the commitments and concerns of the interlocutor, using the opponent's own terms and arguing in a way to convince the opponent and not just make an example of them for others. His own argumentative method provides an illustrative example. Yoder wrote *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking*, already discussed in chapter 2, as an immanent criticism of just war reasoning. Despite not ascribing to just war theory as an ethical position, in that book Yoder argues from the premises of just war theory, trying to get those who *do* hold that theory to take more seriously its prohibitions on indiscriminate violence. For this, Yoder was chastised by some of his fellow pacifists, who worried he was granting legitimacy to a fundamentally untrue moral and theological position. Yoder's response is illuminating; he writes first that by helping just-war theorists live by their own best lights, he can realistically achieve a greater reduction in violence than if he sought only to convince them of his own commitment to nonviolence. He then adds,

But even if they refuse to hear me, and to respect the restraints they are theoretically committed to, I owe it to their dignity as fellow humans... to address them in terms of their moral culture, not only of mine. That readiness to make oneself vulnerable to the language world of the other, as a part of the ecumenical conversational process, is itself a minority view. For many, the only honorable

⁴³ John Howard Yoder, *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*, eds. Glen Stassen, Mark Thiessen Nation, and Matt Hamsher (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 112. This is an allusion to the Sermon on the Mount; "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." Matthew 3:38–41 (NRSV). We will discuss what "vulnerability" means in this context in section II.E.

stance in ecumenical settings is a vigorous advocacy of the rightness of one's own orthodoxy. For me, the opposite is the imperative on the grounds of practicality, ethics, and spirituality.⁴⁴

Yoder's rhetorical approach is, on the one hand, a matter of persuasive strategy. "If I should succeed in understanding and interpreting the just war tradition at its best," he writes, "it should be possible for me to state more convincingly its shortcomings, and thereby to make the case for what I consider to be the gospel alternative."⁴⁵ A dialectical response that takes seriously the strengths and concerns of the just-war tradition is more likely to receive a fair hearing from those who are not convinced that it is fundamentally wrong.

But Yoder insists his commitment to second-mile dialogical vulnerability is not just based on its viability as a persuasive strategy. He writes, "My position is itself a form of love of the enemy, turning the other cheek, affirming the dignity of the adversary, which also underlies my refusal of war."⁴⁶ That is, Yoder's "going the second mile" in arguing with just-war theorists is integral communication. By showing one's interlocutors that one cares enough about them to try to convince them instead of dismissing their views out of hand, one conveys an implicit message of care and concern for one's interlocutors as people. This message of enemy-love is conducive to Yoder's proximate and ultimate ends. If this message of care and concern is combined with a substantive challenge to one's interlocutors' viewpoints, then we have an effect similar to Deming's "two-handed communication."

⁴⁴ *The War of the Lamb*, 110. Cf. John Howard Yoder, "'Patience' as a Method in Moral Reasoning," in *The Wisdom of the Cross*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 24–42. For an analysis of five biblical examples of this second-mile approach, see John Howard Yoder, "'But We Do See Jesus': The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth" in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 46–62.

⁴⁵ *The War of the Lamb*, 110.

⁴⁶ *The War of the Lamb*, 111.

This second-mile dialogical vulnerability is not compromise, in the sense of giving up something essential in order to convince opponents to cede some of their position. It is not a matter of meeting the opponents halfway. It is also not rooted in a positive evaluation of the viewpoint the critic engages with, or even a neutral evaluation of “both sides make good points.” It is rooted solely in concern for the opponent as a person. As Yoder writes, “I know from having tested it for thirty years *from inside* that the just war tradition is not credible. I don’t dialogue with the just war tradition because I think it is credible, but because it is the language that people, who I believe bear the image of God, abuse to authorize themselves to destroy other bearers of that image.”⁴⁷ Yoder’s constructive, dialogical engagement with this tradition, then, does not stem from an appreciation of the merits of its positions but from an enacted compassion for the people who hold them.

This is an important point. Frequently, people using Victory reasoning will dismiss calls to be more dialogical, insisting that the position they are arguing against is *so wrong* that it does not deserve to be engaged with. The assumption is, to revisit the analogy between communication ethics and the ethics of war, that our communicative strategy should be proportionate to the falsehoods and injustices we are opposing. The worse their position is, morally and factually, the more justified we are in opposing it by whatever means are at our disposal (name-calling, silencing, uncharitable representation, etc.). As we saw in chapter 2, this logic can lead to spiraling destructive conflicts where all parties feel unheard and mistreated. If someone calls you a fascist and says your position does not deserve a hearing, you might interpret their strongarm tactics as a totalitarian power play, and call them the real fascists, and

⁴⁷ *The War of the Lamb*, 116.

so on and so on until everybody walks away from their computers in self-congratulatory frustration.

For second-mile dialogical vulnerability, the alternative is not to insist “their position is not that wrong,” but to question the assumption that the wrongness of a position is the metric by which we judge how harshly we can respond. If the proximate goal is to change people’s minds, and the ultimate goal is to testify with words and actions to the truth of the gospel, then the question shifts from “how fierce a reprisal is justified?” to “what sort of corrective would bring the right kind of pressures and help all parties draw closer to the truth?”⁴⁸ The answer to this latter question may be a vehement and unflinching condemnation of a particular position, but the motivation for this condemnation will include a compassionate concern for those who hold the position and a desire to help them come to a more truthful conclusion, and the symbolic actions will, as much as possible, reflect that concern and show interlocutors the path from error to truth.⁴⁹

Since the opponent is not seen as a threat to be simply overcome in the pursuit of one’s goals, but a person to whom one ministers, using forms of criticism that are not addressed at least in part to one’s opponents is shirking one’s responsibility. This is what is *dialogical* about second-mile dialogical vulnerability: it is a mode of communication that (1) responds to the opponents’ expressed views, (2) speaks in some sense *to*, and not merely *about*, one’s opponents, and (3) invites an authentic response from them.⁵⁰ When one declares that an opponent’s position is wrong, then, one (1) listens carefully to the opponents to make sure one has understood their

⁴⁸ On Christian communication as a series of correctives, see Yoder, “‘Patience’ as a Method in Moral Reasoning,” 115.

⁴⁹ “The path from error to truth” comes from Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*” in *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, 119.

⁵⁰ Here, as elsewhere, my understanding of dialogue derives principally from Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin.

views, (2) tries to help the opponents recognize that the position is wrong, even if the opponents are not one's immediate audience, and (3) does not treat their wrong position as if it were the last word about them.⁵¹

This threefold commitment makes criticism more difficult. Ministering criticism is more demanding than strident criticism or the open-minded refusal to criticize. Second-mile dialogical vulnerability requires that one go the extra mile for the sake of the opponents' humanity and for the sake of the truth.⁵² Why should Christians adopt this costly mode of social engagement?

The answer, according to Yoder, is that this commitment is an integral part of the gospel.⁵³ The Christian gospel is concerned speech. As one commentator summarizes Yoder, "The gospel is gospel only if it can be received as such."⁵⁴ Etymologically, "gospel" and "evangel" (from the Greek *euangélion*) both mean "good news." This, for Yoder, offers us a crucial insight into both the content and the shape of Christian witness.⁵⁵ He writes,

⁵¹ More on this in section II.C. "The last word" is a key phrase in Desmond Tutu's moral theology.

⁵² Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 292. Yoder adds that using the interlocutors' terms does not limit the messages one can express. By proclaiming the message in these terms—or in "middle axioms" intelligible to the interlocutors—the message transforms what the users of those terms previously thought could be expressed. In dialogue, one begins where the other is but takes them where they have never been. "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 296; cf. John Howard Yoder, *Christians Witness to the State* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002).

⁵³ Yoder has a capacious definition of what counts as sharing the gospel that includes many messages that are not explicitly religious. He writes, "On whatever level we find a man in the effort to speak to him, what we ask of him is that he accept the gospel.... What we ask of him does not cease to be gospel by virtue of the fact that we relate it to his present available options. It is rather the gospel itself in relationship to his present situation, that situation in turn being determined largely by his earlier disobedience. If, for example, a subordinate officer in the Korean War had been challenged to treat his prisoners of war according to the Geneva Convention, or if a French intelligence officer in Algeria had been challenged not to torture innocent suspects, the only way he could have responded to this challenge—even though it was placed before him fully in terms of his present military involvement and of military justice—would be to take a step of obedience which would be costly, would be an act of repentance, would be a leap of faith, would bring upon him suffering and reproach, would be made possible only in the strength of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ." *Christian Witness to the State*, 25; cf. 32–33. I can neither elaborate on nor defend this idea here, but I am attempting to make a similar point using the language of ultimate ends and proximate ends.

⁵⁴ Alex Sider, "Memory and the Politics of Forgiveness" in *The New Yoder*, eds. Peter Dula and Chris K. Huebner (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 172.

⁵⁵ "If it is the case that we understand ourselves to be bearers of God-mandated good news for the world around us, then both how we communicate and what we communicate about will testify to that newness." Yoder, "Meaning after Babble," 135. To belabor the point, the connection between "how" and "what" is at the heart of ICC.

For a practice to qualify as ‘evangelical’ in the functional sense means first of all that it communicates *news*. It says something particular that would not be known and could not be believed were it not said. Second, it must mean functionally that this ‘news’ is attested as *good*; it comes across to those whom it addresses as helping, as saving, and as *shalom*.⁵⁶

For Yoder, Christian communication is integral to the extent that it is conveyed as good news to the interlocutor. As news, Christian communication testifies to an event that happened or is happening: the liberation and reconciliation brought into being through Christ. Christian communication reflects this reality even when Christians are not speaking explicitly about religious matters. It does not (here I am going beyond Yoder) need to convey a message the interlocutor has never heard before, but rather the aspect of truth that they need to hear in the moment. To say the Christian gospel is news, then, is to say that it is dialectical and corrective—it takes into consideration what the interlocutor knows and believes before making a symbolic action. Christian communication is responsive at the same time as it is proclamatory; it is dependent upon listening to the other for its status as gospel.

In order to be communicated as *good* news to interlocutors, the message must be presented in a way that reveals a better way forward for the interlocutors. Yoder writes, “It is *good* news because hearing it will be for them not alienation or compulsion, oppression or brainwashing, but liberation. Because this news is only such when received as good, it can never be communicated coercively; nor can the message-bearer ever positively be assured that it will be received.”⁵⁷ To put it other words, the good news is a message of liberation, including for the enemy, and needs to be expressed so audiences (including the enemy) can as much as possible reasonably be expected to hear it as such. Christians cannot demand assent to the gospel, because

⁵⁶ Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 373.

⁵⁷ *The Priestly Kingdom*, 55. Cf. “What accredits news as ‘good’ is that it enables or even commands a wholeness or fullness, a validation or flourishing, not actualized in its absence. It cannot be imposed by authority, or coercively. It is rendered null when assent is imposed.” “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 292.

to do so would be to betray its liberating message.⁵⁸ Similarly, for reasons akin to those discussed by Freire and Campbell in chapter 3, Christians cannot express the message of the gospel using manipulative rhetoric; Yoder writes, “We cannot communicate the meaning of the cross of Christ using a manipulative power technique... The ends and the means have to fit. The content and form have to relate. The meaning of the cross is a renunciation of such power as God’s way to be reconciled.”⁵⁹ These methods of coercion and manipulation can certainly succeed in making people confess Christianity, but at the expense of distorting and betraying the Christian message. (G.K. Chesterton once quipped, “Lying may be serving religion; I’m sure it’s not serving God.”⁶⁰ We could extend this line of reasoning to a number of persuasive tactics.)

Before moving to the next point, it bears repeating that this evangelical, “second-mile-dialogical vulnerability” approach to advocacy in social conflict is commensurable with strong, prophetic criticisms of injustice and idolatry, including active disruption of systems that dehumanize and exploit. In Paul’s words, “we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles;”⁶¹ thus the gospel is emphatically not a message one’s enemies will always approve of even when proclaimed in an integral way. The goal is not to preach a message audiences will like, but to preach a message they can recognize as a message of liberation and reconciliation for all, including themselves.

⁵⁸ Yoder’s treatment of this issue is much more detailed, and it draws on the specific theological resources of the “believers church” tradition.

⁵⁹ Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 110. Yoder argues elsewhere, “The truth claim of the herald or witness must remain thus noncoercive if it is to be valid. You never have to believe it.” This is due to the nonviolent content of the witness’s message, as I am arguing, but also because the witness is testifying to a “contingent, particular event” in history rather than a conclusion made within the bounds of reason alone. *The Royal Priesthood*, 256. If an apologist leaves no room for doubt, then what the apologist is arguing for is not Christianity.

⁶⁰ G.K. Chesterton, *The Father Brown Omnibus* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1935), 527.

⁶¹ I Corinthians 1:22 (NRSV).

For this reason, as Kierkegaard argues, a person who hears the gospel and takes offense to it has understood it better than one who is persuaded by an illusory half-gospel of cheap grace, fear-driven moralism, or cultural conformity.⁶² To avoid preaching a half-gospel, Christians need to have a dialectical sensitivity to the concerns, terms, and beliefs of their audiences, communicating in correctives with the intent to show all audiences a deeper truth than previously believed. Christians do not engage their interlocutors in dialogical criticism because of a set of rules for civil discourse or an instrumental strategy of “winsome” evangelism. Christians do this because of their commitment to this deeper truth—a truth that needs to be shared and embodied, a truth that unsettles and sets free, a truth we do not possess but encounter.

***II.B. Not an idea to be considered, but a summons to act;
Not a position to agree with, but an occasion for self-examination***

In the previous section, I argued, following Yoder, that Christians cannot demand assent to the gospel. One may object here that the sorts of communication appropriate to evangelism specifically do not extend to other Christian communicative pursuits. If we grant that Christians cannot use what Robert Nozick calls “coercive arguments”⁶³ to back people into an intellectual corner and compel them to accept Christian doctrine, can Christians justifiably use coercive arguments in the pursuit of proximate communicative ends?

The discussion of coercive means by the nonviolent direct action tradition offers a helpful analogue. As part of a strategy of two-handed communication, pursued in a spirit which communicates good will toward opponents, these arguments certainly have a place. In situations

⁶² The notion of “cheap grace” comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 43–56.

⁶³ Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1981), 1–24. The term was first used by William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1902), 429.

where all parties share standards of judgment, such as geometry, coercive arguments that lead ineluctably to one conclusion can be used to show interlocutors the error of their previous conclusions. But the further one gets from these shared standards, and the less one seeks to show one's interlocutors a better way, the more one runs the risk of jeopardizing the ultimate end by coercively pursuing proximate ends. When Christians stop trying to persuade their interlocutors and instead try to crush them or reduce them to silence, even if the topic in question is not religious, Christians are not testifying to the love of God that embraces and transforms all people. Many of the debate tactics taught in schools, practiced online, and demonstrated in public forums are efforts to triumph over the opponent in the eyes of third parties using obfuscation, misrepresentation, shaming, and posturing. Through these tactics, one may "win the debate" and even convince onlookers of a particular ethical or political standpoint, but at the expense of treating the opponent as a mere means to one's end. Thus, whatever truthful messages one may convey, one also conveys an implicit message at odds with a central affirmation of the Christian gospel.

Efforts to discourage Christians from using coercive arguments, judgmental language, and triumphalist rhetoric are often interpreted as expressions of diffidence or outright skepticism. To withhold strong judgments and compelling arguments, it is assumed, must be a sign of hesitation, a cowing to the pluralistic sensibilities of the age, or a diplomatic unwillingness to ruffle feathers. By contrast, the argument of this section is that Christians should be wary of these forms of argumentation and proclamation because they so easily entail the distortion of the gospel. It is precisely out of an interest in proclaiming the gospel rightly that Christians should think twice about the rhetorical styles prevalent in ethical, political, and religious argumentation.

We do not need to recount here Kierkegaard's case that treating Christianity as a matter objective truth distorts rather than proclaims the message of what Kierkegaard calls "the Christianity of the New Testament." Even if one finds Kierkegaard's argument overdrawn, apologetics and preaching at least run the risk of reducing Christianity to a set of propositions to be assented to at arm's length. Through indirect communication, Kierkegaard tries to subvert readers' tendency to treat Christianity as a set of doctrines to be understood without self-examination.

Yoder's rhetorical approach is more direct, but shares a common goal: helping audiences recognize the good news as good news for them (Kierkegaard's "*pro me*"). As we discussed in chapter 4, there is a difference between saying "I love everyone" and telling a person you love them. The gospel is closer to the latter; it is universal in scope but particular in expression. It is not good news for all people in an abstract sense, it is good news for you and for you and for you, and so on. For Yoder, this addressivity is a goal Christians should strive for in their communication. By addressing one's message to the other in their particularity, responding to their specific concerns, one performs the "for you" quality of the Christian message. As Roberts writes,

All people are addressed by God as they are and where they are, even if they are called forth to change their place and condition. Before a personal or social revolution can be carried forth, God's word to humanity must be understood and appreciated. A worthy theological enterprise brings the revelation and the human situation together in order that a person may be able to find self or ethnic understanding, and thereafter liberation and fulfillment. This is the nature, medium, and message of God's revelation to humans...⁶⁴

⁶⁴ *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 40.

By helping people connect divine revelation with their particular concerns and situation, Christians can not only facilitate greater understanding of this revelation (like a teacher who connects the lesson with the students' experience), but also attest to the particular love of God, the God who leaves the ninety-nine to seek out the one.

Yoder contrasts this approach with the two-step process in which one first discerns the truth of the matter and then monologically announces one's conclusions to audiences in a way that demands either assent or silence. Yoder associates this two-step process with epistemological foundationalism, or at least the way foundationalism is often employed to justify ethical and theological positions.⁶⁵

In the version of foundationalism Yoder critiques, thinkers can get beyond their own particularity by a set of rational moves to attain universal truth. Anyone who arrives at another conclusion is, by definition, irrational. Dissenters have only two options: accept the "rational" conclusion, or be relegated to a marginal status—at best tolerated and at worst considered a threat to the rational consensus. The goal of inquiry is to arrive at the true conclusion that will allow us to dismiss all rival claims (from within ourselves as well as from others).⁶⁶ Foundationalism relies on method to transcend the particularity of one's own discursive community and to arrive at a conclusion that is universally, neutrally, and exclusively correct.

By contrast, Yoder argues, "We must abandon the chimerical vision of a set of semantic or definitional moves which would transcend the limits of one's own identity, rationally coercing

⁶⁵ I say "version of foundationalism" because Yoder acknowledges that foundationalist rhetoric can be a way of showing someone the steps to arrive at the truth. See "Meaning After Babble," 134.

⁶⁶ Yoder's critique of foundationalism has close parallels with Wittgensteinian and pragmatist epistemologies, as well as the "good reasons" approach of Stephen Toulmin, Henry Johnstone, and Walter Fisher. I hope to explore these connections in greater detail in subsequent projects.

assent, without taking account of a particular interlocutor or a specific dialogical setting.”⁶⁷ All communication is from particularity to particularity.⁶⁸ To imagine that we can ever escape our own context-boundedness is an illusion. But this is not a reason for despair, because the idea of truth as something that can be apprehended only when humans transcend their particularity is also an illusion. There is an ineliminable intersubjective dimension to reasoning; we make sense to and with others, or not at all. We discover truth not by abstracting from the give-and-take of human interaction but by striving for integrity, honesty, and uncoerced consensus within human interactions and using the criteria we inherit from others.

Yoder recognizes that intersubjective rationality feels like a threat to any attempt to justify timeless, context-independent moral laws. But it is not a threat to the Christian gospel of liberation and reconciliation. The gospel is good news for each person in every community, but it is good news to them in their particularity, not in spite of it. Christians can ascribe neither to “that’s true for you, this is true for me” relativism nor to “there is one final and absolute formulation of the truth” foundationalism. Because the good news is shared, it is neither the exclusive property of the church nor an abstract universal truth independent of human concerns and criteria. The Christian message is neither an esoteric deposit of faith beholden to one culture and language, nor a deductive QED of reason independent of all cultures and languages. It is a boundary-crossing, incarnational message that makes its home in different cultures and languages, submitting to and transforming particular people’s criteria for intelligibility and rationality. This is how Christians live out their mission to witness to all people; Yoder writes, “Rather than seeking a ‘higher’ or a ‘prior’ level (as the several kinds of ‘foundational’ appeals

⁶⁷ “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 290. This section is only a brief summary of Yoder’s work on rationality. For more, see the essays collected in *A Pacifist Way of Knowing* and the “Epilogue” by Early and Grimsrud.

⁶⁸ Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel,” 289.

do), we must enter concretely into the other community (that is, one particular other community at a time) long enough, deeply enough, vulnerably enough, to be able to articulate our Word in their words.”⁶⁹ Christianity involves commitment to truth claims. But this does not mean that these claims need to be justified independently of interpersonal encounters. The kind of truth Christianity is is the kind of truth that demands to be realized in vulnerable, interpersonal encounters, not before the court of appeals of disembodied reason.

Much more could be said about Yoder’s epistemology, but the relevant conclusions for communication in social conflict are as follows: rather than claiming to possess objective truth and dispensing it *to* interlocutors, Christians accept intersubjective rationality and seek to test their truth claims *with* and *for* interlocutors.⁷⁰ Instead of a two-step process where the correct ethical, political, or theological position is validated and subsequently imposed, one’s diverse audiences are included in the process of validation.

In social conflicts, the foundationalist move can be an attempt for one party to try to disqualify their opponents rather than respond to their concerns. Social conflicts are like soccer games in which each side insists that they are not a team but the referees, and they spend their time trying to red-card one another off the pitch. Much of what passes for debate is a refusal to engage in argumentation by insisting that the other side’s views are indefensible.⁷¹ Efforts are spent to perfect the method rather than engaging with the voices that call one’s own into question. Kierkegaard’s criticism of Christian apologetics is that it can too easily turn Christianity into a philosophy that can be ascribed to without changing one’s life. In a similar

⁶⁹ “Meaning After Babble,” 132.

⁷⁰ See John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 142.

⁷¹ Wayne Booth analyzes some of the epistemological presuppositions that contribute to these impasses in his classic *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

fashion, foundationalist argumentation can too easily turn ethics and politics into a pursuit of reassuring ourselves we have the right answer or are on the right side instead of facilitating cooperative efforts for justice and the common good.

Instead of first getting it right and then being exasperated when others refuse to fall in line, second-mile dialogical vulnerability begins in the messiness of human ethical, political, and theological reasoning. The goal is not to get everyone else to conform to our vision of the true and the good, but to transform the particular social systems that inhibit each person from fully recognizing the truth and living as members of the Kingdom of God. Christians cannot be faithful to the gospel by dispensing answers without doing the difficult work of hearing and addressing their interlocutors' questions. But by listening to these questions and seeking to discover the good news with and for the interlocutor, Christians exhibit the individuating love of God.

***II.C. Not silence or reprisal, but disrupting injustice;
Not prompting defensiveness, but inviting change***

The three viewpoints on communication ethics surveyed in chapter 1 take different stances on the ethics of judging other people. Wary of being judgmental, Open-mindedness eschews judgments altogether. People make "I-statements," express their own needs and feelings, and make requests, but they refrain from evaluating other's actions. Victory, by contrast, is willing to make judgments about others, usually with the stipulation that personal attacks are justified so long as they are true. If a public figure's policies show them to be a bigot or a murderer, then we should not mince words. As usual, Civility walks a line between these two viewpoints. The received wisdom is to avoid *ad hominem* attacks and judgments when they are not directly relevant to the issue at hand. What counts as "relevant" is slippery, and in

practice people are more willing to justify attacks against their opponents but condemn attacks against their own side.

In contrast to all three viewpoints, the Christian approach I advocate here involves making judgments about another person's actions, but not letting a person's actions have the last word about them as a person. This distinction closely follows the nonviolent direct action tradition's distinction between a person and their role, as discussed in chapter 5. It is similar to, but not the same as, the rule in some Civility literature that one can attack a person's ideas but not the person themselves. That rule is difficult to abide by, because as Eugene Nida puts it, "We are what we think."⁷² As discussed in chapter 2, many disagreements that seem to one group to be about ideas (about the ethics of homosexuality, say, or the truth of a religious doctrine) are to another group about people's identities. Whether or not something is an idea to be debated is often decided by one's position going into the debate.

By contrast, when participating in social conflict, the implicit messages Christians send ought to line up with the Christian theme of redemption. This may mean making criticisms that are perceived as *ad hominem*, including calling into question the integrity and character of the interlocutor.⁷³ But the crucial point is that, in a two-handed way, even these criticisms must point the way for the interlocutor to recover their status as a moral creature made in the image of God. This is a major theme in Desmond Tutu's theology; he reiterates that no person is beyond the scope of redemption.⁷⁴ Emphasizing that Jesus' ministry on earth was to sinners, and that several

⁷² Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission: The Communication of the Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 78.

⁷³ Making an *ad hominem* argument is not necessarily the same as committing the *ad hominem* fallacy. The *ad hominem* fallacy uses a point utterly irrelevant to the issue at hand, like the interlocutor's physical attractiveness in a debate about maritime law, to dismiss or discount the interlocutor's point. See Henry Johnstone, *Validity and Rhetoric in Philosophical Argument* (University Park, PA: Dialogue Press of Man & World, 1978).

⁷⁴ Desmond Tutu, *God Has a Dream*, 3; *The Rainbow People of God*, 121–22; *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 84–85.

of the key Christian saints began as violent and wicked people, Tutu argues that we betray the gospel of transformation when we treat people as if their sins had the last word on them as a person. Recounting his time as the chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he writes,

So frequently we in the commission were quite appalled at the depth of depravity to which human beings can sink and we would, most of us, say that those who committed such dastardly deeds were monsters because their deeds are monstrous. But theology prevents us from doing this. Theology reminded me that, however diabolical the act, it did not turn the perpetrator into a demon. We had to distinguish between the deed and the perpetrator, between the sinner and the sin, to hate and condemn the sin while being filled with compassion for the sinner. The point is that, if perpetrators were to be despaired of as monsters and demons, then we were thereby letting accountability go out the window because we were then declaring that they were not moral agents to be held responsible for the deeds they had committed. Much more importantly, it meant that we abandoned all hope of their being able to change for the better. Theology said they still, despite the awfulness of their deeds, remained children of God with the capacity to repent, to be able to change.⁷⁵

Tutu does not flinch from making strong moral judgments about others' actions, but insists that even when one's intention is not explicitly evangelistic, demonizing and stigmatizing others is self-betraying communication when viewed in the light of Christians' ultimate ends. Using devil-terms to label and silence people,⁷⁶ even if those terms are justified by those people's statements or actions, is counter-productive to proclaiming the message of freedom for sinners.

Rather than having a commonsense understanding of sin and using that to understand the remedy, Christian theologians understand sin in light of the fact that the prescribed remedy is

⁷⁵ *No Future without Forgiveness*, 83. Cf. *God Has a Dream*, 10–11; Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), 55. The notion of “loving the sinner, hating the sin” has understandably been criticized, but usually because it is often employed in contexts where the “sin” in question is not actually a sin or where “loving the sinner” has been only a hollow slogan and not a concerned compassion.

⁷⁶ See Richard M. Weaver, “Ultimate Terms in Contemporary Rhetoric” in *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), 211–32. Weaver's examples of devil-terms are “Communist” and “un-American,” but terms differ in different contexts.

good news. The liberation and reconciliation Christ brings into being—good news of great joy to all people—is a starting point for theological reflection on the brokenness of the world.

Theologians work backward, as it were, from the form and content of the gospel to make sense of the problems Jesus was confronting, healing, and forgiving. Sin is fundamentally a failure to believe and trust the good news that tells us we are loved regardless of what we do and that we were made for fellowship and communion with God and one another.⁷⁷ Kierkegaard writes, “The opposite of sin is not virtue but faith.”⁷⁸ Building up faith in one another—whether through preaching, encouragement, rebuke, or ministering presence—is the Christian way of addressing the neighbor’s sin.

Recognizing one’s consubstantiality with the sinner is necessary for ministering criticism.⁷⁹ Tutu writes, “When we begin to realize that God loves us *with* our weakness, *with* our vulnerability, *with* our failures, we can begin to accept them as an inevitable part of our human life. We can love others—with their failures—when we stop despising ourselves—because of our failures. We can begin to have compassion for ourselves and see that even our sinfulness is acting out of our suffering. Then we can see that others’ sinfulness is acting out of their suffering.”⁸⁰ For Tutu, then, confession of sin, recognition of one’s belovedness, and understanding the opponent are all woven together in one process: the process of coming to believe the good news. It is through this process that we recognize one another not only as fellow sinners but as part of the same family, responsible to and for one another.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Cf. Desmond Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God*, 61.

⁷⁸ *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Edna Hong and Howard Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 82.

⁷⁹ See Russell Johnson, “Behind Blue Eyes: Consubstantiality and the Unthinkable,” *The Other Journal* 27 (February 6, 2017), <https://theotherjournal.com/2017/02/06/behind-blue-eyes-consubstantiality-unthinkable/>.

⁸⁰ *God Has a Dream*, 39. Cf. 97, 119–20.

⁸¹ Tutu writes of the early church, “The world saw a veritable miracle unfolding before its very eyes as all sorts and conditions of women and men, rich and poor, slave and free, Jew and Gentile—all these came to belong in one fellowship, one koinonia, one communion. They did not regard one another just as equals. That in itself would have

Christians' response to sin is always *for the good of the sinner*—not mere retribution—and it is integral communication when it is expressed as such. This often includes challenging illusions, including the illusions by which people some distinguish themselves from others and find their senses of self.⁸² Since social inequalities often provide an inflated sense of self-worth for those who benefit them, challenging the illusions that justify inequality will be likely to offend the sensibilities of the privileged. The more invested a person is in an unjust system, the more painful it will be for them to receive a message that exposes the lie at the heart of that system. But as Tutu reiterates, Christians' goal is not to pass judgment on the perpetrators of injustice but to free all people involved from oppressive systems. These systems, as we have discussed, dehumanize even those who directly benefit from them.⁸³ It may be difficult to show people how they are harmed when they harm one another, but this can be done, and it will take a dialectical sensitivity to bypass and subvert the illusions that stand in the way of a better world.

How can criticism of sinful actions and structures be expressed as good news for the people responsible? One avenue forward is restorative justice. Roberts argues that liberation and reconciliation form a gestalt, and this gestalt is characteristic of Christian social ethics. Reconciliation without liberation is something less than the Kingdom of God, and so is liberation without reconciliation. For Roberts, well-meaning Christians are led astray to the extent they pursue one at the expense of the other (and to reiterate, this is a costly reconciliation and not just

been a huge miracle, for a slave to be accepted as an equal by his former master. An equal you can acknowledge once and then forever thereafter ignore. No, they regarded one another not just as equals but as sisters and brothers, members of one family, God's family." *The Rainbow People of God*, 118–19. The notion of "God's family" is central in Tutu's theology.

⁸² Nouwen, McNeill, and Morrison, *Compassion*, 18–21. Cf. Luke 18:9–14; the Pharisee's prayer, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector" exemplifies an illusory way of understanding one's value that would need to be challenged in order for the Pharisee to understand himself as a child of God and a neighbor to the tax collector.

⁸³ This is a major theme in Tutu's work. See *No Future without Forgiveness*, 103, 196–97; *God Has a Dream*, 49–52; *The Rainbow People of God*, 201–2.

a superficial harmony).⁸⁴ For Tutu, when someone has done wrong or contributes to an unethical system, the practical form of this gestalt is restorative justice.⁸⁵ The phrase “restorative justice”—like the phrase “dialogical criticism” I have been using in this dissertation—indicates that there are two processes often seen as at odds with each other working in conjunction. At a social level, restorative justice combines the concern for reconciliation (building community and fostering understanding) with the concern for liberation (redressing wrongs and breaking cycles of violence).

Restorative justice takes into consideration the needs and concerns of the perpetrator and the victim in a much deeper way than retributive punishment. Justice that brings wholeness for the victim, the perpetrator, and the communities they belong to is more effective at breaking the cycles of resentment and fear in which hurtful actions are committed and rationalized. In social conflicts, it is easy to try to shame people who speak untruths or who defend unjust systems, but this can all too easily deepen the ruptures, leaving people feeling victimized instead of chastened. The voices we repress tend to reemerge with new fervor and insistence; we cannot simply be shamed out of our sins. A restorative, upbuilding response that charts a way forward for the opponent while resolutely insisting on the error of their actions and conclusions is a more profound disruption than the classical conditioning model of condemnation. These responses are *ad hominem* in the sense that the critic recognizes the opponent’s commitments are a part of their character, but the critic is not judgmental because their speech makes it clear to the opponent the critic is “not counting their trespasses against them.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 34; cf. *A Black Political Theology*, 219–22.

⁸⁵ Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 54–56. The landmark book on restorative justice is Howard Zehr’s *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995).

⁸⁶ II Corinthians 5:19 (NRSV).

We have already discussed the distinction between unjust systems and the people in them, but a bit more needs to be said about this distinction in light of the Christian message of liberation and reconciliation for all. Liberation has two interrelated components—spiritual liberation from the illusions that exploit and dehumanize, and political liberation from unjust social and economic structures.⁸⁷ Both are necessary. Similarly, reconciliation has a spiritual component—an awareness of the interdependence of all people, which Tutu calls *ubuntu*—and a political component, which includes the dismantling of apartheid and other structures that enforce division.⁸⁸ These four components work together in a complex harmony akin to Deming’s “two-handed communication,” and it is Tutu’s aim as a theorist-practitioner of Christian nonviolence to bring all four pressures to bear to transform society and share the good news. To bring about “peaceful revolution,” Tutu combines these four components—not one before the other, but all at once—in complex symbolic actions that reflect the Kingdom of God.

Tutu thus calls into question the wisdom of Victory’s insistence that we need to institute laws and policies first and only after that worry about how people treat one another. He also challenges how Open-mindedness equates compassion for people with disavowing activism. Political action aimed at proximate ends like legislation or regime change can be done in a way that facilitates dialogue and reconciliation. Tutu’s approach is different, too, from Civility’s “rules of engagement” because his goal is not to defeat the opponent but to make it clear—in political structures and in interpersonal interactions—that all people are sisters and brothers in

⁸⁷ On the latter, see Desmond Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God*, 37–38; Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 7, 34–35.

⁸⁸ This includes reparations. Tutu writes, “Those who have wronged must be ready to make what amends they can. They must be ready to make restitution and reparations. If I have stolen your pen, I can’t really be contrite when I say, ‘Please forgive me,’ if at the same time I still keep your pen. If I am truly repentant, then I will demonstrate this repentance by returning your pen. Then reconciliation, which is always costly, will happen.” *The Rainbow People of God*, 222. Cf. *No Future without Forgiveness*, 270–71. Cf. Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 55–59.

God's family. Tutu helps us see how enemy-love is not a constraint that limits one's political activism, but rather a means and an end for prophetic political engagement.

Christianity has (understandably) become associated with judgmentalism in twenty-first century America. Christian communicators who do not want their messages to be heard as holier-than-thou moralizing need to be attentive, as Kierkegaard suggested, to their audience's preconceptions, and distinguish their dialogical criticisms from pious imprecations. They cannot simply insist their intentions were good and that they were misunderstood. On the other hand, religion has become associated with one's private convictions or cultural identity. Christian communicators who do not want their moral judgments to be heard as mere opinions or cultural sensibilities also need to be attentive to how their messages are received. Navigating this rhetorical situation is not an easy task, but Tutu's use of ICC suggests one way to go on.

***II.D. Not zero-sum conflict, but a better society for everyone;
Not against people, but against systems***

Since the gospel is a message of reconciliation, any communication that deepens an "us versus them" division will be self-betraying communication. This is the case whether Christianity is framed as on one side of this antagonism or not. The good news of Jesus is that we no longer need "us versus them" frameworks to make moral judgments, unite communities, motivate self-sacrificial action, or convince ourselves that we have value. The framework of "us versus them" has been replaced with two alternative frameworks: "God for us all" and "us for them." According to the first, it is God's grace that vouchsafes every person's value. Any attempt to reassure ourselves that we are have greater value because "we" are not like "them" is shown to be foolish and invidious in the light of the gospel. Because God is for us all, we can embrace one another as sisters and brothers. There are still important differences between

people; these are revealed as reasons for celebration and mutual appreciation rather than as threats to community.⁸⁹ According to the second, courageous moral action is motivated not by the heroic need to overcome a villainous enemy, but through the joy of serving others, even those others who call us enemies. Christians gather together in churches not to preserve their purity from outside contamination but to hear the good news, respond in worship, and to work collaboratively to care for each other and for those outside the church.

Self-righteousness and judgmentalism are, therefore, betrayals of the gospel. So, too, is antagonism. Efforts to enlist Christianity to one side in a zero-sum social conflict, like a political party, an ethnic group, or a nation-state, are also betrayals of the gospel.⁹⁰ God refuses to be *for us* in a way that makes God *against them*. As Tutu writes, “Any policies that make it a matter of principle to separate God’s children into mutually opposing groups is evil, immoral, and unchristian.”⁹¹ This is not a peripheral point for Christian ethics, it is at the heart of Christian theology. God’s love is all-embracing, granting mercy to sinners regardless of their identity, or else there is no reason for any of us to hope.

Interpreting Ephesians, New Testament scholar Markus Barth writes,

To confess Jesus Christ is to affirm the abolition and end of division and hostility, the end of separation and segregation, the end of enmity and contempt, and the end of every sort of ghetto! Jesus Christ does not bring victory to the man who is on either this or that side of the fence. Neither rich nor poor, Jew nor Greek, man nor woman, black nor white, can claim Christ solely for himself... Christians bear witness to Christ only when their words and deeds make it plain that Christ is as much the outsiders’ and opponents’ Christ as their own. He is the end of division and enmity. Christ is he who has made something new of the two: the near and

⁸⁹ Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God*, 119; Markus Barth, *The Broken Wall*, 44.

⁹⁰ “God bless America,” when said during peacetime, is a prayer of blessing for a nation. When said during wartime, with the implication that God’s blessing America means death and destruction for America’s enemies, it is blasphemy. On this point, I am indebted to George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1984), 64.

⁹¹ Quoted in Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997), 123.

the far, the insiders and the outsiders. ‘In Christ those afar have become such that are near’ (2:13). Christ is that reconciliation which is greater and stronger than the hostility of either or of both. He is not what a Christian can give to others. He is the gift of God to both. If he ‘is peace’ (2:14), then he is by nature a social, even a political event, which marks the overcoming and ending of barriers however deeply founded and highly constructed these appear to be.⁹²

Because Christ has broken down the walls of partition that separate “insider” from “outsider,” it follows that Christianity demands to be proclaimed in ways that deconstruct, de-essentialize, and subvert zero-sum divisions between groups. “Christians versus Muslims” and “Christians versus atheists” are illusions, and when Christians’ rhetoric plays into these illusions, it is self-betraying communication.

In the context of the American political conflict, “liberals versus conservatives” is a common zero-sum framework. There are relevant differences between these groups’ ideas, and distinguishing between these two groups is often useful. But as King pointed out, Christians see the fundamental conflict as between justice and injustice, between truth and untruth, not between any two groups of people. The struggle for truth and justice in this world will inevitably lead Christians to offer their support to candidates from a particular political party and express hope that particular candidates are not given opportunities to implement their policies. But the fundamental victory around which Christians orient their lives is a victory for all people. This fundamental conflict and fundamental victory are crucial for the intelligibility of the Christian message of liberation and reconciliation, and Christians engaging in political discourse need their rhetoric to be determined by these more so than the frameworks of political antagonism. Because “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh” (Ephesians 6:12), Christians need to

⁹² Markus Barth, *The Broken Wall*, 43–45. Desmond Tutu writes similarly, “In God’s family, there are no outsiders. All are insiders. Black and white, rich and poor, gay and straight, Jew and Arab, Palestinian and Israeli, Roman Catholic and Protestant, Serb and Albanian, Hutu and Tutsi, Muslim and Christian, Buddhist and Hindu, Pakistani and Indian—all belong.” *God Has a Dream*, 20.

make it evident in their communication that political opponents are not the actual enemy but fellow sinners, beloved by God, who are deceived by illusions that inhibit them from working for the good of all. Though we may join movements and work for political victories, this is not done to triumph over others but to testify to the Kingdom of God that brings liberation and reconciliation for our enemies.

***II.E. Not just changing “them,” but changing ourselves;
Not imposing a new arrangement, but finding a synthesis***

Closely connected to the illusion of “us versus them” is the illusion of “good guys and bad guys.” Christianly speaking, there are no such things as good guys and bad guys. Every person is a work in progress, a dynamic and unique child of God who has sinned and been reconciled through Christ, and is at one stage in the ongoing process of coming to recognize and appreciate this truth. We can speak to individuals differently, based on the particular corrective they need to hear in order to recognize the gospel more fully. But we cannot treat them as if their sins have the last word about them. Karl Barth writes,

On the basis of the eternal will of God we have to think of *every human being*, even the oddest, most villainous or miserable, as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father, and we have to deal with him on that assumption. If the other person knows that already, we have to strengthen him in the knowledge. If he does not know it yet or no longer knows it, our business is to transmit this knowledge to him.⁹³

According to Barth, a Christian’s calling to witness precludes discrimination, even discrimination based on a person’s unjust behavior and dangerous ideology. Witness also demands humility. No matter how faithful and orthodox a Christian may be, we all need to be “strengthened in the knowledge.” We need the gospel preached to us at every step in our journey.

⁹³ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1960), 53.

As Markus Barth writes, “Only while being evangelized ourselves can we ever hope to become evangelists. We are not proud possessors, spenders, and defenders of the Gospel truth over against a nasty world.”⁹⁴ Rather, we are witnesses in both senses of the term: sharing the good news and hearing the good news, often simultaneously in the same encounter. To take upon ourselves the mantle of the “good guys” is to shut ourselves off from this economy of sharing and to shut our ears to the voice of God in the voices of others.

Christian witness is not only a matter of speaking but of listening. As we have discussed, by listening to the other—including the opponent—and taking seriously the concerns they express, we convey a message to them that their voice matters. Also, by listening, we can better understand the illusions that impede understanding and communication, and we can construct a corrective. But more than this, we have the opportunity to learn from them, to have our own blind spots and illusions revealed, and to hear the good news. It is a theme throughout the Bible that words of truth often come from the most unexpected people, such as the Roman centurion who said, “Surely this man was the Son of God”⁹⁵ and the unlikely ministry of the apostle Paul. Counterintuitively, it is sometimes the enemy who conveys the message we need to hear the most; the voice we resist most strongly holds the key that can free us from our limited perspective. Since Christians maintain that the good news comes ultimately from God and not from especially wise or virtuous people, they are open to hearing this news in every encounter. The Christian life is a life of constructive criticism—giving and receiving. Humility and boldness, often considered opposites, are brought together in Christian confession because the

⁹⁴ *The Broken Wall*, 27.

⁹⁵ Mark 15:19. Some scholars interpret this exclamation as sarcasm, which fits with some themes in Mark. See Mark Goodacre, “The Centurion’s Sarcastic Cry in Mark 15.39,” *NT Blog* (April 15, 2009), <http://ntweblog.blogspot.com/2009/04/centurions-sarcastic-cry-in-mark-1539.html>. Parallel passages Matthew 27:54 and Luke 23:47 seem to treat the exclamation as an inchoate confession of faith, echoing a prior story of a Roman centurion in those Gospels (Matthew 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10).

truth Christians witness to is not their own achievement or possession, but the redeeming work God has done for them and for their enemies.

The *vulnerability* of “second-mile dialogical vulnerability” includes recognizing the possibility that the interlocutor’s viewpoint may challenge one’s own conclusions and presuppositions. This does not mean a person should enter every disagreement willing to change their mind on the key issue in question. Say, for example, I get into an online argument with a person who believes that no one should ever help homeless people. My interlocutor is not going to convince me of this position, and it would be ludicrous to insist that I should remain open-minded to it. But in the conversation I might learn something about dependency, economic incentives, and the dignity of work that leads me to nuance and clarify my own position, or at the very least rethink how I and people who agree with me articulate that position. Compromise and concessions are not the test of whether vulnerable dialogical encounters have taken place. It is possible—common, even—that a person who listens vulnerably and charitably to the concerns of their opponent will end up more convinced of the truth of their own position. The opposite of vulnerable listening is not firm convictions but the assumption that because a person is wrong about a topic they have nothing valuable to contribute to the discussion and that their criticisms can be ignored or treated merely as corollaries their fundamentally wrong presuppositions.

This blend of humility and conviction reflects the Christian confession that “we know in part and we prophesy in part.”⁹⁶ This sort of listening is rooted in and expresses the Christian understanding of sin. Sin is never entirely a problem “out there” but always also a problem “in here,” and it hinders everyone from understanding, appreciating, and believing the good news.

⁹⁶ I Corinthians 13:9 (KJV). It is not accidental that the classical biblical statement on epistemic humility, that “we see through a glass, darkly” is in a chapter about love.

Since Christian witnesses share with their interlocutors the limitations of sin, they view their interlocutors not as a wicked “them” but as fellow sinners struggling and often failing to apprehend and live into the truth. Means that are expressive of this commonality will thus be conducive to the end of Christian witness even when the issue in question is not explicitly theological.

Vulnerable listening is integral because creating an atmosphere in which people know their concerns will be heard is itself a form of Christian ministry. Listening is care. As the feminist theologian Nelle Morton puts it, “We empower one another by hearing the other to speech.”⁹⁷ Since sin names the destructive, delusive attempts to meet our own needs, fostering spaces where people can express their needs—even in the midst of conflict—is itself a work of healing.

In addition to this healing ministry, Yoder names two epistemological bases for listening to the opponent. First, he cites Gandhi’s argument that “the adversary is part of my truth-finding process. I need to act nonviolently in order to get the adversary to hear me, but I need as well to hear the adversary.”⁹⁸ By excluding from one’s reasoning process the voices that earnestly call one’s ideas into question, one takes a presumptuous attitude toward the truth itself. Here there is a difference between creativity and alethiology. In creative pursuits, it’s often wise to pay no attention to the critics, because one’s goal is to be authentic to one’s own vision. In the pursuit of truth, however, one’s critics point out the wrongful assumptions, flawed reasoning, and cognitive

⁹⁷ Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 128. Morton’s immediate context is listening to the voices of the oppressed, but the same principle applies when one is listening to the powerful enemy. Listening can have profound psychological effects in a process of two-handed communication that refuses to grant others’ claims to oppressive power but offers them a deeper power rooted in vulnerability and understanding. This is the basis of Walter Wink’s influential interpretation of Jesus’s exhortation to go two miles with one who compels you to go one mile; see Wink, “Jesus’ Third Way” in *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 98–111.

⁹⁸ John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 69.

biases that prevent one from comprehending something not located solely within oneself. The less one attends to serious challenges to one's views, the more it seems like (and becomes) the case that one is making something up more so than discovering something true.⁹⁹

Yoder's second epistemological point is that whenever it becomes a practice to dismiss dissenting voices, marginalized voices are the ones most likely to be dismissed. He writes, "Liberation theologians today speak of 'the epistemological privilege of the oppressed.' There is no blunter instrument to guarantee such a hearing to hitherto inadequately spoken-for causes than to remember Paul's simple rule that everyone must be given the floor."¹⁰⁰ The practice of silencing dissenting voices or treating them only as problems to be solved disproportionately excludes those who are already underprivileged. Since the gospel is first and foremost good news to the disempowered, Christians especially should be on guard against this tendency.

Returning to Yoder's personal combativeness when confronted about his sexual abuse, we can now see how this attitude betrays the gospel and Yoder's own theology of nonviolent dialogue. By reducing to silence for years the voices that challenged his abuse, Yoder abandoned the search for moral truth and contributed to the chronic disempowerment of women. His communicative patterns betrayed the gospel, and betrayed that his own "experiments" were not genuine attempts to discern a faithful Christian sexual ethic. Yoder's self-delusion about these matters, and the ways other leaders' actions supported it, should be instructive for all Christians in positions of power. The failure to listen to and take seriously objections and accusations preserves an unjust power structure that perpetuates itself at the expense of the Kingdom of God.

⁹⁹ I realize this is an oversimplification; the relationship between creation and discovery is more interwoven than this paragraph suggests. See, for instance, the work of Michael Polanyi. I also recognize that the qualifiers "serious" and "earnestly" are ambiguous in the same way rules of civility are. I include these to indicate that a dialogical critic has no obligation to respond to people who are "trolling" or "sealioning."

¹⁰⁰ *Body Politics*, 69. "Paul's simple rule" refers to I Corinthians 14.

In conclusion, Reinhold Niebuhr writes, “If only we could understand that the evils against which we contend are frequently the fruit of illusions which are similar to our own...”¹⁰¹ Christian witnesses should not only accept this possibility but positively expect that this will be the case in social conflict. This does not mean that everyone is equally wrong and differences of belief are insignificant. But it does mean that every disagreement is an opportunity not only to convince the interlocutor of one’s own viewpoint but also to examine oneself—with the interlocutor’s help—and test the truthfulness of one’s own views. Even if there is a plank in the opponent’s eye and a speck of sawdust in your own eye, it is still important to have the speck of sawdust pointed out and removed.¹⁰² In a passage quoted by Yoder, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel writes,

We find the clearest example of the spirit of nonviolence in dialogue. We know how difficult it is to have a dialogue while it is easy to have two simultaneous monologues. In a monologue we seek to justify ourselves alone and to denounce the errors of the adversary alone. In a dialogue, on the other hand, we begin by seeking the truth that lies with the other side, the good there is in our adversary. We have to be honest enough to tell him or her what we have found. Next, dialogue requires us to raise our consciousness of the matter in which we ourselves in our lives have betrayed the truth we find in our adversary. Only then may we declare our own truth—in full knowledge that we have often been unfaithful to it, too, by our actions.¹⁰³

This nonviolent dialogue is neither the triumphalistic pronouncement of someone who is the sole possessor of the truth nor the diffident open-mindedness of someone who is merely offering their opinion. It is rather the courageous effort to seek the truth with the interlocutor, fully aware that this seeking may call one’s prior commitments into question. In dialogue, we risk alienating the

¹⁰¹ *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952), 16. Cf. Nouwen, *Peacework*, 67.

¹⁰² Matthew 7:3–5. I owe this way of phrasing the point to David Barr.

¹⁰³ *Christ in a Poncho*, 126, quoted in Yoder, *Nonviolence: A Brief History* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 144. This passage is from the “Declaration of the International Meeting of Latin American Bishops on ‘Nonviolence: A Power for Liberation,’ November 28–December 3, 1977,” which seems to have been penned by Esquivel and certainly shows his influence. The Declaration deserves to be considered a minor classic of Christian nonviolence, but it is difficult to find information about its origin.

interlocutor with our honesty, and we risk giving up the illusions and self-righteousness we cling to, all for the sake of truth.

Though the immediate context is a Christian statement about nonviolent direct action, Esquivel's emphasis on consciousness-raising and self-examination echoes themes from Freire, Campbell, and Kierkegaard. We can conclude, then, that this dialogical approach is applicable in diverse situations for diverse proximate ends. This nonviolent dialogue works better as a cross-contextual communication ethic because it is based on the dignity of each person as beloved by God, the pervasiveness of sin and the limits of human understanding, and the good news of liberation and reconciliation, and not on the perceived merits of the opponent's views, a code of fair play open to interpretation and exceptions, or predictions about the strategic value of a rhetorical tactic.

III. Conclusion: Speaking the Truth in Love

“Speaking the truth in love”¹⁰⁴ is the New Testament phrase that best encapsulates Christian communication ethics. Stated so simply, however, it is filled with ambiguities. I hope that in this chapter I have shown that Christian witness is as much about listening as it is about speaking, as much about discovering truth as proclaiming it, and as much about a confronting, demanding love as it is about empathy and kindness.

Much has been said thus far about speaking, and quite a bit about the truth. In this conclusion, we will reflect briefly on love. Yoder writes, “Under the Spirit of God, both our means and our ends must (and by his power can) be love: openness, reconciliation, the impatience that calls for repentance and the patience which does not coerce, the dialogue which

¹⁰⁴ Ephesians 4:15 (NRSV).

assures the other, even the enemy, of our respect for his dignity, and the proclamation which assures the world that God's righteousness will conquer in the end."¹⁰⁵ Love is thus both the means and the end of Christian communication. In social conflict, this love is not necessarily a warm feeling for our opponents but an active and dialectical effort to, as King puts it, "make them know that we love them,"¹⁰⁶ even as we make them know that we will not permit injustice and untruth to triumph. Christian love tries to make itself known as love to the other, even if in the process it challenges the illusory and half-true understandings of love that stand in the way of liberation and reconciliation.

This is a difficult task. I hope that this dissertation has shown just how difficult it can be to combine compassion and confrontation, and how the customary approaches to thinking about morals and values in the pursuit of social change are not sufficient. But I also hope that integral communication criticism is a useful tool for navigating the many situations people find themselves in, and that the dialogical criticism I argue for is a more fruitful way to engage in social conflict. I have tried to make this dissertation itself an example of dialogical criticism—not only pointing out the shortcomings of the Civility, Victory, and Open-mindedness viewpoints, but working with the grain of their concerns to develop a cross-contextual communication ethic that weaves together morality, effectiveness, and nonviolence.

Though I have argued that Christians should be attentive to rhetoric, Christians' confidence cannot ever reside in "wise and persuasive words"¹⁰⁷ but in the liberating and

¹⁰⁵ Yoder, *For the Nations*, 235.

¹⁰⁶ For King's extended discussion of *agape*, see *A Testament of Hope*, 19–20. On the difference between loving your enemy and having positive feelings about your enemy, see Tutu, *God Has a Dream*, 78–79.

¹⁰⁷ I Corinthians 2:4 (NIV).

reconciling love of God, to which we can only be grateful witnesses. The last word, then, belongs to Desmond Tutu:

All over this magnificent world God calls us to extend His kingdom of shalom—peace and wholeness—of justice, of goodness, of compassion, of sharing, of laughter, of joy, and of reconciliation. God is transfiguring the world right this very moment *through us* because God *believes in us* and because God *loves us*. What can separate us from the love of God? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. And as we share God’s love with our brothers and sisters, God’s other children, there is no tyrant who can resist us, no oppression that cannot be ended, no hunger that cannot be fed, no wound that cannot be healed, no hatred that cannot be turned to love, no dream that cannot be fulfilled.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ *God Has a Dream*, 128.