



Dialogic Civility

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What is it?

Civility is a concept that has been used in various ways to capture how life is best lived in cities in which citizens are dependent on each other and the state. Central to all understandings, however, is the idea that a civil society offers a common space for diverse viewpoints: a place where differences can be heard and not disregarded. Civility is the communication style best suited for sustaining the defining characteristic of a civil society. Adding the descriptor “dialogic” to the concept of civility acts to stress the importance of a dialogic communication style to the management of difference. Dialogic civility is characterized as a communication practice that is invited, is historical and temporal, and cannot be demanded or enforced. Achieving dialogue, however, is not a definitional requisite; rather, it is acting in a dialogically civil manner premised on a responsibility to the other that really matters.

Who uses the concept?

The broad notion of civility is a commonly used term across disciplines from political science and pedagogy to communication where it is frequently linked with notions of liberal democracy and chosen as the core concept in calls for improving the quality of political discourse. The more specific notion of dialogic civility is not yet commonly used. Arnett and Arneson first proposed the concept of dialogic civility in 1999 in order to capture a core ethical requirement in the practice of dialogue specifically in the public domain, where distance (psychological and/or physical) between communicators is the norm. In contrast to broader notions of dialogue, no intimacy is presumed or expected with dialogic civility. In addition, the idea of dialogic civility not

only draws attention to the importance of keeping the conversation going but also reminds us that there is no final word to be had.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Dialogue is commonly proposed as the most appropriate means for managing intercultural difference and diversity. Dialogic civility proposes a more focused metaphorical frame for guiding this process in the public arena: an arena in which much of intercultural dialogue takes place and in which a respect for difference as well as distance would seem paramount.

What work remains?

It would be valuable to explore the conceptual links between dialogic civility and other related communication styles or practices, such as listening, hospitality and conviviality. It would also be of particular value to elaborate on the differences between dialogic practices in the public and private arenas—especially following the distinction made by Hanna Arendt—and the intercultural political-policy implications that follow from such a distinction.

Resources

Arnett, R.C. (2001). Dialogic civility as pragmatic ethical praxis: An interpersonal metaphor for the public domain. *Communication Theory*, 11(3), 315-338.

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Lane, S.D. (2005). Dialogic civility: A narrative to live by. *Texas Speech Communication Journal*, 29(2), 174-183.