



# The Ethics and Politics of Speech: Communication and Rhetoric in the Twentieth Century

*Pat J. Gehrke*

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In *The Ethics and Politics of Speech*, Pat J. Gehrke provides an accessible yet intensive history of the speech communication discipline during the twentieth century. Drawing on several previously unpublished or unexamined sources—including essays, conference proceedings, and archival documents—Gehrke traces the evolution of communication studies and the dilemmas that often have faced academics in this field. In his examination, Gehrke not only provides fresh perspectives on old models of thinking; he reveals new methods for approaching future studies of ethical and political communication.

Gehrke begins his history with the first half of the twentieth century, discussing the development of a social psychology of speech and an ethics based on scientific principles, and showing the importance of democracy to teaching and scholarship at this time. He then investigates the shift toward philosophical—especially existential—ways of thinking about communication and ethics starting in the 1950s and continuing through the mid-1970s, a period associated with the rise of rhetoric in the discipline. In the chapters covering the last decades of the twentieth century, Gehrke demonstrates how the ethics and politics of communication were directed back onto the practices of scholarship within the discipline, examining the increased use of postmodern and poststructuralist theories, as well as the new trend toward writing original theory, rather than reinterpreting the past. In offering a thorough history of rhetoric studies, Gehrke sets the stage for new questions and arguments, ultimately emphasizing the deeply moral and political implications that by nature embed themselves in the field of communication.

More than simply a history of the discipline's major developments, *The Ethics and Politics of Speech* is an account of the philosophical and moral struggles that have faced communication scholars throughout the last century. As Gehrke explores the themes and movements within rhetoric and speech studies of the past, he also provides a better understanding of the powerful forces behind the forging of the field. In doing so, he reveals history's potential to act as a vehicle for further academic innovation in the future.

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