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**What Does It Mean to Listen to Someone?
Listening as an Act of Hospitality**

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Abstract:

This thesis puts forward a phenomenological account of what we refer to when we talk about the phrase 'to listen to someone'. On this account, listening is an intersubjective, and therefore ethical, relation in which the listener is not passive but actively involved. Listeners, particularly when relating to those who are disempowered, have a Levinasian responsibility to offer the other person the hospitality of listening to them, thereby facilitating the completion of that person's communicative aims.

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to listen to someone? This is the question to which I endeavor to offer an answer in this thesis. Western philosophical traditions have long been obsessed with the thinking, speaking subject, with the nature and power of language, with the mechanisms of perception of sounds, speech, and music, and with how the thinking, speaking subject should think and speak about or to others. By default, we investigate what it means to speak before investigating what it means to listen. We wonder how we can make our thoughts heard before wondering how we can do justice to the communicative attempts of others.

We all have felt the frustration of not being listened to. We can make fine distinctions, claiming for instance that one's boss "heard me out and said he understood, but he did not listen to me." We can also note, more positively, that "although he did not grant my request, at least he listened to me." Listening is a type of responsiveness which is subtly and specifically differentiated from a host of other modes of receptivity to the communications of others: hearing, comprehending, understanding, and interpreting are not sufficient to fulfill the task of listening, but neither does listening require one to obey, comply with, or agree with the speaker, according to the ways we talk about 'listening to someone' in everyday speech. The nuance is strange; what space is there on a scale of receptivity between understanding and agreement? And what is it about that sliver of space occupied by listening which makes it so infuriating when someone refuses to listen to us?

My task is to give an account of the meaning of 'to listen to someone', as distinct from all other adjacent modes of receptivity, and to account for the meaning that this 'listening' holds for us. A satisfactory account must explain why a refusal to be listened to feels like a moral offense, and it must explain the structure of the intersubjective relation referred to by the phrase 'to listen to someone'. Implied by the great frustration we experience in response to someone's refusal to listen to us is that listening is in some way a function of agency: the person either chooses to listen, or not to listen. If listening is a function of agency and arouses moral outrage when withheld, then I must first give an account of listening as a function of subjectivity: what does it mean *for me* to listen to someone? To answer this question, I establish listening as an intersubjective relation, which is to say that I am offering an account of the phenomenology of listening, based on a Levinasian phenomenology of intersubjectivity. Inasmuch as listening is a relation between

subjects, it has an ethical structure, and the ethical structure of listening follows a paradigm of hospitality.

The purpose of phenomenology, broadly speaking, is to get at the most basic, underlying, primordial, ground-level structures of being, consciousness, and lived experience.¹ Classically, phenomenology begins with questions of the self as primary, and the relationship of the self to the other as presupposing the existence and experience of the self. By contrast, Emmanuel Levinas builds his phenomenological view on a tectonic reversal, putting one's encounter with the *other* at the most primordial ground level of conscious experience, meaning that the ego itself is structured by intersubjectivity. My experience of being me arises from the encounter with one who is not-me.

This reversal rockets the ethical relation to the forefront of the phenomenological account, because concern for the other structurally underlies the experience of the 'solipsistic' self. Accounts which originate with the self begin with the self's approach to the world: to items and objects in the world, to knowing and comprehending and using and objectifying the world. We may be skeptical about the reality of the other or the personhood of the other (objectification), or the relation the other has to me. The *self* is the given in this classic paradigm, while the other and my relation to the other are secondary. Under these 'self-before-other' phenomenological accounts, epistemology comes up before ethics. But under Levinas's account, ethics comes up before epistemology. This reversal is encapsulated in an essay by Levinas entitled 'Ethics as First Philosophy' (Levinas 1989, 76–87). Because the other is already present at the primordial root of conscious experience, so is the ethical relation. In the Levinasian view, the relation between me and the other comes prior to the epistemic relation between me and the world.

What results from these two approaches to phenomenology is that we have two fundamentally different approaches to discourse. If what is primary is the self and its relation to the world, then any utterances and texts and manifestations of the other are encountered primarily as objects to be grasped, comprehended, and understood—and of course also to be judged as epistemologically correct or incorrect. On the other hand, if what is primary is

¹ One could say that phenomenology is a kind of hermeneutics of experience, although phenomenologists differ about the role of hermeneutics in their respective accounts. It is beyond the scope of my present paper to offer a hermeneutic *method* of listening; that is a task for the next project. The present project is more specifically an examination of the subjective experiences of listening and being listened to—which is to say that, inasmuch as phenomenology and hermeneutics are different, the present project is more a phenomenology of listening rather than a hermeneutics of listening.

the other and her relation to me, then any utterances and texts and manifestations of the other are encountered primarily as personal, intersubjective revelations eliciting a response from me, which may be beneficial or harmful to her. The first is a paradigm which lends itself to the primacy of speech—that is, to the pronouncement of knowledge and information and claims about the world. The second is a paradigm which lends itself to the primacy of listening to the other, whose presence before me calls me into question.

What lies at the most primordial moment of subjective experience, for Levinas, is the encounter with the face of the other. He says, “The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question” (Levinas 1989: 83).² Levinas writes that this encounter is the beginning of language, which begins with the Other appealing to me, to my ability to respond to her in either harmful or non-harmful ways—that is, to my ethical responsibility not to harm her. The phenomenology of speech, therefore, is first and foremost a response to the call of the other, not the first act of discourse but the second. In the same way that this view puts the ethical relation as prior to the epistemic relation, it puts the ethical act of listening prior to the speech act itself. My account of the structure of listening finds its home here in Levinas’s phenomenology.

My purpose is to reverse-engineer this view as a basis for understanding the phenomenological deep structure and implicit ethical relation involved in listening to someone. In particular, I am concerned with the cases in which a person of relatively high power seeks to listen to a person of relatively low power. To speak of a person of low social power ‘listening’ to someone in authority verges on triviality, being more trivial the more the more coercive the scenario. What is the difference, in the context of slavery, for example, between listening to the master and merely being forced to obey? It is difficult to say; the coercive scenario obscures the distinctive nature of listening as opposed to other modalities of receptivity and responsiveness to the utterances of others.

² For Levinas, the face and the look of the other are the key structures of this relation, and the calling and responding and genesis of language arise from the face and the look. I agree with Adriana Cavarero, who points out that there is a vast resonance between this face/look (which is visual) and the voice (audible), as signifying the site where the relation with the other is established. Since my account is focused on listening, there is more imagistic continuity in keeping the audible experience of the other at the forefront of the discussion instead of the visible face; for purposes of my argument the face and the voice form close enough analogues that I will use them more or less interchangeably, preferring to refer to the voice of the other except where citing Levinas’s work in reference to the face. I discuss the theme of the voice in chapter 1, section IV.

The more interesting and more revealing case is that in which the ‘Other’ is a person of relatively low power, having a socially undermined voice, being vulnerable and therefore dependent on whether I, in a position of higher power, truly listen to them. This social structure more clearly reflects the phenomenological deep structure of that primordial relation, which is prior to social structures, hierarchies, and regimes of authority and coercion. Powerful people have neither need nor societal obligation to listen to the voices of the oppressed. Systems of privilege lead to the silencing or disempowerment of the voices of many people, to the point that those who are being harmed are unable to speak their accusations toward those who are harming them. It is therefore a primary desideratum of my account, that listening should be construed as an act which is by itself ethical. If I were to posit that listening is merely a neutral part of the communicative processes, and that ethical concerns come into view only when considering what response I make to the accusations of the oppressed *after* I have listened to them, then my account would imply that the refusal of the powerful to listen to the voices of the oppressed is not an ethical problem. Not only would such an account fail to answer why it is so infuriating when someone refuses to listen to me, but would also be complicit in social and ontological privileging of powerful subjects. My aim is instead to do justice to the very real concern that *not* all human subjects³ have as much power to speak as does the subject par excellence of Western philosophy. Not all people have the verbal skills or social standing of an Aristotle or a Descartes.

Scalability is another desideratum of my account. What Levinas describes as the primordial encounter of intersubjectivity should, on my account, form the paradigm for understanding listening at every level: the act of listening to an infant’s cry, or of listening to the claims of a battered woman in conversation, to the broader cultural issue of listening to the voices of People of Color when confronting racial injustice as a structural feature of society. Throughout this paper, I give examples which span these concentric layers, from the minutest to the broadest instances of listening, from the sublinguistic (the infant’s cry) to the linguistic utterance, to the metalinguistic (interracial discourse). I exclude from my account the notion of ‘conversation’, in which it is assumed that all parts of the discursive relation are in place: conversation consists of two people taking turns speaking *and* listening to each other. As such, I consider my account of listening to be more fundamental than accounts which focus solely on conversation and social discourse, for which reason my

³ Although at present I am referring only to human subjects, my account certainly has room to be extended to include animals, to whose sounds and body language we can and should listen.

account is not built on the Socratic approach to dialogue or the discursive ideas of Habermas. I also bypass Gadamer, whose account of hermeneutics is chiefly concerned with interpretation of history, texts, and conversation, although there are intriguing parallels that could be drawn between my account and his premise of the interpretive activity of the fusion of horizons (Gadamer 1982).

Moreover, the deep philosophical bias toward the productive side of communication—that is, toward making utterances in speech or writing—means that my account must resist the tendency to predicate listening on the speech act type, rhetorical quality, or social power of the speaker. If I am to achieve my aim of giving an account of listening which is alive to the ethics of listening in and of itself, then my account should resist the chronic possibility for the powerful to excuse their refusal to listen to the vulnerable by appealing to the insufficiency of their communicative efforts. I cannot say that listening is an activity which is controlled or structured primarily by what type of speech act another person makes, or by whether they successfully accomplish their communicative aims. Instead, my account seeks to locate responsibility for listening solely with the listener, so as to create an inroad for holding powerful people responsible for refusing to listen to those who are disempowered. Therefore, my account does not proceed from established philosophical views in which the bias towards speech is so prevalent. Rather, I proceed by beginning from defamiliarizing mythological and metaphorical images of communication, as well as making use of colloquial scenarios and complaints to establish the specific activity of listening in the forefront of my discussion, without framing it as parasitic on the productive side of communication.⁴

For this purpose, my first chapter is a reflection on the phenomenal experience of the relation referred to as ‘listening to someone’: what is picked out by the verb ‘to listen’ as distinct from other conceptually close verbs like ‘to hear’, and what is picked out by the verbal object. That is, in our talk about listening to someone—to a person, a human subject—we are talking about a relation of responsiveness to a person’s communicative aims, whether they communicate through speech, through voice, or even through silences and omissions. Critical to this chapter is a focus on the subjectivity of the other, and how they express their

⁴ This account is not intended to be in conflict with analytic accounts of philosophy of language, but only to make entry into a lacuna of production-oriented accounts. The task of reconciling the phenomenology of listening presented here with speech act theory is beyond the scope of this project; my task in the next project will be to give an account of listening in the context of speech act theory which is consistent with the argument given here.

subjectivity through a variety of communicative means. By framing listening to someone as principally an *intersubjective* relation—‘inter-subjective’ literally meaning ‘between subjects’—I am setting myself the task of giving an account in which the subjectivity of both sides of the relation is in view, without giving in to the philosophical habit of focusing on *either* the subjectivity of the self (that is, of the ‘I’) *or* on the subjectivity of the productive side of the communicative scenario. Thus, in order to resist the inertia of these habits, my first chapter is devoted to the subjectivity of the *other*, not the I, and the second chapter is devoted to the subjectivity involved in the *receptive* side of the communication scenario.

As such, I argue in the first chapter that in order to pick out all the right scenarios which are candidates for ‘listening to someone’, we must emphasize not that the verbal object of the phrase is the speech of the other subject, but that the verbal object is the other subject’s communicative aims in their entirety. Not only those aims expressed in speech qualify, for many communicative aims may be expressed paralinguistically, through voice and gesture, or through non-linguistic means. If the relation in question is one which I form with the speech of the other, then many of a person’s communicative aims would be excluded from the relation. Instead, by framing ‘listening to someone’ as an *intersubjective* relation, I include as candidates any means by which a subject expresses herself to me; my relation is to her, not to her words only. Only then does the will the phenomenal description of the relation we describe as ‘listening to someone’ pick out *all* the right scenarios, including those in which an other whose voice has low social power or whose linguistic competence is limited expresses her communicative intent to me.

In the second chapter, I shift focus from the subjectivity of the other to the non-passivity of listening, and the responsibility which belongs to the listener in their receptive activity. My argument in this chapter is structured around the interaction between Socrates’ dialogue in the *Phaedrus* and Derrida’s essay, “Plato’s Pharmacy”, in which Derrida deconstructs Socrates’ arguments in the *Phaedrus* about the value of speaking over that of writing. Derrida’s deconstruction involves subverting the assumption that only the production of utterances is active, while the reception of utterances is passive. For Socrates, the activity and responsibility all lie with the speaker/author, and in writing, the author is absent, which results in weakness on the part of written texts. For Derrida, reading is clearly an activity which involves responsibility and agency, which means responsibility for communicative success is distributed between author and reader, and writing remains a very powerful medium.

What my argument in this chapter does is trace the move that Derrida makes through metaphors to deconstruct the Socratic hierarchy of speech over writing, making argument by analogy: with speech as well as writing, responsibility for communicative success is distributed between both speakers and listeners. In the situation which is my focus, listening to a single communicative act of a low-power other, the assumption is that the speaker's capacity to ensure communicative success is compromised, which means that the bulk of responsibility falls to me as the listener. This entails deploying my own resources—energy, attention, risk of incrimination—for the task of listening. The notion of receiving the other's communication at cost to myself follows a more than metaphorical paradigm of hospitality.

From there I root the interpersonal action of listening as a kind of hospitality in the ethical framework of Levinasian phenomenology, which is a phenomenology of hospitality.⁵ My final chapter ties the deep structure and implicit power relations of this moment of listening to a person with a disempowered voice to the Levinasian account of the primordial encounter of the self and the other. In addition to having the benefit that Levinasian phenomenology involves a prioritization of the other over the self and of the ethical over the epistemological, Levinas's account gives us the conceptual vocabulary to articulate a powerful and meaningful account of the unique and vital phenomenology of listening. By placing the intersubjective relation at the center of subjectivity, Levinas views subjective being as in need of justification: if my being is displacing or doing violence to someone else, for example, then my being here is not justified. Ethical responsibility arises from this need to justify, rather than assume the rightfulness of, our being in the world.

I argue that a person's choice to accept their responsibility for justifying their being in the world, rather than assuring their being in the world at possible expense to others, makes the difference between two alternative underlying stances toward the world. The assurance stance, in which assuring my own being takes priority over fear or concern for the other, is a stance in which I refuse to listen to someone whose message is costly or calls me into question. The justification stance, in which my own being must be justified, is a stance which welcomes the other and listens to what she has to say, even at cost to myself. This stance is the basis of hospitality. To listen to someone means to take responsibility for one's

⁵ As Levinas writes at the conclusion of *Totality and Infinity*, “the becoming-conscious is already language, that the essence of language... is friendship and hospitality” (Levinas 1969, 305).

role as listener in ensuring the speaker's communicative success even at risk to oneself: listening to someone is an act of hospitality.

CHAPTER 1: Uncovering the Ethical Structure of the Listening Relation

What does it mean to listen to someone? This question can mean two things: what is the activity we are referring to when we talk about 'listening to someone', and what is the meaning, or significance, that this activity has for us? To answer the first question, I survey the phenomenal experience of the particular type of intersubjective relation which is established between two people when one listens to the other. The emphasis in this chapter is not on the other as a speaker, but on the other as a *subject*, in pursuit of some communicative aim. This chapter focuses on the subjectivity of the other; the next chapter focuses on the subjectivity involved in the receptive side of the communicative scenario. I refer throughout to the phenomenal experience of being or not being listened to, because recalling what it is like to be not listened to reveals the answer to the second sense of the opening question—what the significance is of this 'listening to someone'. What it is like to experience someone's willingness or refusal to listen reveals the underlying ethical structure and implicit power relations involved in the relation of listening to someone, which will be elaborated in the subsequent chapters.

Section I is concerned with the distinctiveness of the verb in question from other verbs of communication reception. In section II, I introduce the myth of Echo as a figure which problematizes the impulse to link the verb 'to listen' with speech, given that not all people have equal possibilities for expressing themselves in speech. In section III, I re-figure this problem, not as primarily a language problem, but as a problem of subjectivity: to listen to a person with limited capacity to author their own utterances and in so doing to accomplish their communicative aims requires an account of listening which cannot be reduced to an issue of language processing. Section IV deals with the possibility of listening to someone by listening to her voice rather than to speech. Section V deals with listening to someone by listening to silences and omissions.

I Listening, Among Other Verbs

The inference that immediately arises from the phrase 'to listen to someone' is that we are considering a situation in which there is someone, and that this someone is making

some kind of meaningful sound, and that there is someone else, who is listening to the sound being made by the first person and understanding its meaning. We can manipulate the focus of the activity of listening by manipulating the phrase, changing the object of the verb and deploying a familiar imperative framing. If I am exhorting you to listen and I want to urge a focus on the manner and tone with which I say it, I might say, “Listen to my voice!” If I am instead urging a focus on some part of the content of what I am saying which I suspect is not being attended to, I might say, “Listen to *what* I am saying!” If we assume that listening to speech includes attending to both the content of the speech (the words and their meanings) and to the form by which that content is encoded (the sounds which encode the words), then the act of listening includes attention to both sound and content. Both sounds and content can be the objects of the verb ‘to listen to’. Thus, we can listen to a voice or listen to what is being said. As a rule, successful listening includes attention to both these objects. However, neither of these is the grammatical object of the phrase in question.

Instead, the object of the phrase ‘to listen to *someone*’ is neither sounds, nor some linguistic content of sounds, but the person behind the sounds and contents. To listen to a sound successfully means that the process of auditory perception has resulted in the sound signal being appropriately received and processed by the listener. To listen to the contents successfully means that the processes of recognizing words and sentences in the perceptible sound signal has resulted in a correct understanding and interpretation of the signal. To listen to a person, however, entails some kind of perception of a person, of a subject mediated by voice or utterances. In listening to a voice, I experience sounds. In listening to utterances, I experience meaning. But in listening to a person, I experience another being. To listen to a person is to be a (listening) subject perceiving another (speaking) subject by means of a sound signal and the content it carries.⁶ Listening, on my account, is thus a specific type of intersubjective relation, being *inter-subjective* in that it takes place *between two subjects*. In the present chapter I prioritize the subjectivity of the speaking other for two reasons. One reason is to bring into focus the insufficiency of viewing listening as a relation one bears to an object—either a person-object or a sound-object. The second reason is because the present task is to broaden the full range of potential scenarios referred to by the phrase ‘to

⁶ By juxtaposing the subjecthood of both the listener and the speaker, rather than referring to one of them being an object with whom the subject interacts, I am taking the notion of ‘intersubjectivity’ at face value. I will not be dealing with the contradictions that Hegel finds latent in the relations of intersubjectivity, notably in the Master-Slave dialectic (Hegel 1998), nor with the Sartrean notion of the instability in which one is thrown between being a subject viewing the other and being an object seen by the other-subject (Sartre 2003). I take my pattern of intersubjectivity from a Levinasian account, which I discuss in full in chapter 3.

listen to someone' that will need to be embraced by my account, by incorporating *all* means by which a subject endeavors to communicate. A failure to listen to someone is on some level a failure for the speaking subject's communicative aims to be accomplished. In the next chapter I will prioritize the subjectivity of the listener, and in particular, the element of her responsibility for the failed accomplishment of the speaker's communicative aims.

It is worth noting that the phrase 'to listen to someone' generally presumes that one can hear the speaker, and that by listening, one gives some kind of further attention to sound over and above mere passive awareness. This standard distinction between hearing and listening holds as well on the perceptual level, or, for example, in the difference between hearing music and listening to music. This attentional difference between modes of perception has been discussed extensively in philosophy of mind—a discussion I cannot explore in depth here, as mechanisms of perception are not my focus. To note just one relevant insight from that literature: Thomas Crowther points out that we cannot sensibly distinguish between 'hearing carefully' and 'hearing carelessly'; one simply hears. Contrariwise, one can distinguish between 'listening carefully' and 'listening carelessly' (Crowther 2009, 174). This difference indexes in English the basic insight that there is agency involved in the purposefulness of listening and that this agential element distinguishes listening from mere hearing. If listening to someone were a receptive communication act without agency, then it would not really be a candidate for ethical evaluation, or for judgement upon the listener for failure or refusal to listen to someone. Since we do commonly make such judgements, particularly when we are upset on account of not having been listened to, an account of listening to someone must at minimum provide for the agency involved in listening, and of the basis by which the failure of the action can be grounds for casting judgement.

Consider the accusation implied by the attribution of not-listening. "Did you tell her what you want?" "Yes, but she didn't listen to me." One would not say this if, for instance, I had stated my case to someone, but just when I did so, our internet connection cut out. I might say then that she had not *heard* me, and that I would bring it up again later. But when I say that she did not listen to me, I am implying something else. I am implying, firstly, that she *chose* not to listen to my request; despite knowing English perfectly well and comprehending each word and sentence, she chose a non-receptive stance toward my point of view. In some cases, I could say that someone 'did not listen' to mean that the person did not comply agree with me, did not comply with what I was requesting or ordering them to

do, or did not validate my point of view. It would be problematic to argue that listening entails compliance or agreement. I could quite coherently say that, “Although my boss did not make the change I suggested, at least he listened to me, and said he would bear my concerns in mind.”

In some communicative situations, it is logical to cite a person’s non-agreement or non-compliance as evidence that they have not listened, particularly when one is convinced that if the other person were to listen, the person would subsequently agree or comply. But since it is possible for someone to *feel* listened to without receiving agreement or compliance, and since someone can receive begrudging agreement or compliance and yet feel clearly that one was not listened to, listening cannot simply be defined as agreeing to or complying with the communicative aims of the speaker: they are not coextensive. Importantly, one can make a claim to feeling listened to without having any evidence, such as compliant results, to substantiate the claim. This possibility again points the meaning of listening to someone back to a relational, intersubjective stance that is not reducible to the apprehension of an utterance, to the mere external gestures of paying attention to someone’s speech, or to the securing of a desired set of worldly results.

II The Speaking Someone

Without question, to listen to someone requires that there be some kind of communication being issued by the ‘someone’ in question, for the listener to have a means of listening to that person. Speaking and listening are standard opposites in the paradigm of communication, so in this section I am concerned with what it means to be a speaking subject such that one can be listened to.

As I have said, listening to someone in the prototypical instance includes, at minimum, listening to both the sounds of their speech and the content of what they are saying. Part of what makes listening to someone so philosophically interesting is that it is not chiefly a question of how cognitive language processing works—that is a question for cognitive neuroscience or philosophy of language and is outside the scope of my current project—but rather a question of *how* one subject attends to another subject in the quintessentially intersubjective act of listening. An utterance is a stream of words which could presumably be repeated by anyone in any context, but what a person is saying by using a certain utterance in a certain context has to do with what that person is intending to communicate—for example, if she is being direct or sarcastic. Since listening is an inter-

subjective relation, then we need to first deal with the connection between a speaker's subjectivity, as expressed in the intention behind what she is saying, and the speech which is the medium of that expression for many subjects. So then, how do we locate the subjectivity of the other in her communicative activity, so that the emphasis in the listening relation will be correctly placed not on the speech output of the other person, but on the subjectivity of the other person and her communicative *intent*?

Speaking is an agential activity, undertaken as a form of purposeful action on the part of a conscious subject. Speaking is agential in the way that snoring, for example, is not. One who snores makes sound using their articulatory organs—the organs of speech production: the velum accidentally relaxes against the wall of the pharynx, such that when the sleeper inhales, the velum flaps noisily against the pharyngeal wall and causes a snoring sound. We can distinguish this unconscious production of noise from the comparatively autonomous, conscious, purposeful activity by which a speaker puts thoughts into words and pronounces them. The sounds made by the articulatory organs of a sleeper are meaningless, in contrast to the meaningfulness of the utterances by which a speaker undertakes to accomplish a particular communicative aim using words. Snoring is an example of sound produced by the articulatory organs not as a result of, but apart from, communicative intent.⁷ Snoring can be listened to as a sound, but when we speak of listening to someone, we refer to the intersubjective act of listening to a speaking subject—that is, a subject with communicative intent. Of further concern is a case in which a subject wishes to communicate and be listened to, but her communicative intent is disjoined from her capacity to articulate words. Someone who is unable to speak for herself may seek to be listened to, whether by way of the words she says, or otherwise. This possibility arises because listening is, in my account, not a relation to an utterance qua object but to a subject—ideally a speaking subject, but in any case, a subject acting with communicative intent.

The figuration of a speaker whose communicative intent is not realized in speech⁸ is that of Echo, a character from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, particularly as she is construed by Gayatri Spivak. The figure of Echo in Spivak's account exemplifies the idea that some people or groups, whose autonomy is compromised by oppressive or coercive social

⁷ Note that throughout the present paper I use the notion of intentionality in the colloquial sense, without reference to the specialized meaning of 'intentionality' in philosophy of mind.

⁸ In contrast to mythic or quasi-mythic figures who are the usual archetypes of speech and discourse, among them Odysseus and Socrates, Echo is a figure of hindered speech. The story of Echo is found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Ovid 2010, 75–81 [371-561]).

situations, cannot be said to *speak* even though they can talk. Echo was a nymph upon whom Juno had placed a punishment that she could no longer speak except to repeat back the final words of others.⁹ Spivak explains:

As he [Jupiter] played with nymphs, she [Echo] would engage Juno in prudent chat. It is this beguiling prudence that Juno takes from her: you can no longer speak for yourself. Talkative girl, you can only give back; you are the respondent as such. (Spivak 2012, 225).

The ‘respondent as such’ can return the words of others but cannot speak for herself. What is it to speak for oneself? The phrase has three primary meanings in common usage. One meaning, to *speak* for oneself, is to speak by one’s own initiative, as an agent, choosing at will one’s subjects and appending predicates to them. Another meaning, to *speak for* oneself, is to speak on behalf of oneself, as an advocate, communicating one’s thoughts, desires, and needs, in order to secure whatever outcomes one finds beneficial. The third meaning, to speak for *oneself*, is to have the authorial power to testify, that is, to declare the meaning of one’s history on one’s own terms, and to bequeath to the loose piling up of one’s moments the dignity of a unifying narrative, to justify, or not.¹⁰ To speak for oneself is to be the agent of one’s speech, to advocate for oneself, and to author one’s own narrative.

Common to all meanings of to *speak for oneself* is that they refer to someone having the ability and the authority to designate their own subjects and predicates, of which the most important instance is the free use of the pronoun ‘I’ to linguistically convey one’s communicative intent. Echo has been made incapable of speaking this pronoun for herself. She cannot speak about herself or her concerns; she can only say the words of others. An echo, in the natural sense of the term which is her namesake, includes in the sound signal which it returns to a speaker the entirety of what she said, only the speaker does not hear the echo until she stops speaking. As such, she only hears the last portion of her speech echoed back. This limitation suggests one interesting feature of listening to someone, which is that one likely cannot both listen and speak at the same time; if listening were to follow the paradigm of a natural echo, the implication would be that one can not be both a speaking

⁹ Since Echo’s crime was in the purposeful timing of her talkative habit; her punishment was therefore designed to cripple her talkativeness.

¹⁰ In using the term ‘author’, I am referring to the authorship with which one chooses words to convey one’s communicative intent, not to specify an author as a source of a written text. In the second chapter I follow Socrates and Derrida in using ‘author’ to refer specifically to the author of a written text, but in this chapter I use ‘author’ to refer, regardless of the media of communication, to a person’s capacity to convey her communicative intent through language. A communicator without this capacity, such as a person wearing a gag, for instance, still possesses communicative intent which she can convey vocally, but her capacity for authoring her intent into words is temporarily blocked.

subject and a listening subject simultaneously.¹¹ This detail parallels philosophy's habitual focus on the tension between subjecthood and objecthood, which I am deliberately resisting. It would be easy to suggest that the acoustics of an echo imply that speech is active, and that only when one is passive can one listen, and that what determines the success of a subject's communicative aims is how well she speaks.

But what Spivak's attention to the Echo myth and her famous question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), point us toward is the reality that there are many people who deserve to be listened to, but who are not able to speak well. They nevertheless have communicative aims which they seek to express by a variety of alternative means.¹² An account which argues that listening is a relatively passive process contingent on the successful speech of others would entail that when people under such limitations seek to communicate, there is nothing for us to listen to. This conclusion is clearly not acceptable. Hence, my account frames listening to someone as a relation between the subjectivity of the communicator and the subjectivity of the listener. I would not 'hear the echo' or be able to listen to the other while I am speaking, and so as a listener I put myself and my own communicative aims to the side; this displacement does not entail passivity but clears me for the active engagement of listening which will be discussed in the next two chapters. Likewise, 'listening to someone' is framed as a relation with the *subjectivity* of the other rather than the speech of the other, so that when the other is silenced or stifled by some situation of disempowerment¹³, from the linguistic inability of the crying infant to those whose voices are systematically silenced in society, their communicative efforts will still be picked out as sites for the relation of listening to someone.

¹¹ Oddly, I find that listening to someone while I am also talking is difficult, if a person and I are instead singing together, then it is not only possible but essential to the meaning of singing together that we are listening to each other as both singing subjects and listening subjects, simultaneously. But in such a case, singing is not a means of conveying communicative intent so much as a repetition of a known musical work, and so is unlikely to be a candidate for a context in which the paradigm of listening to someone has relevance. Additionally, speaking at the same time as someone may have different meanings in different cultural contexts; it is possible that there are some modes of co-speaking which are not prohibitive of listening, but due to space limitations I cannot explore the possibility here.

¹² Note that, for Spivak, all women are subalterns, and it is clear that many women are not literally unable to speak words; the question has to do rather with the degree to which a person is able to convey her own communicative intents freely to others through language.

¹³ Similarly, Simone Weil comments: "To listen to someone is to put oneself in his place while he is speaking. To put oneself in the place of someone whose soul is corroded by affliction, or in near danger of it, is to annihilate oneself... Therefore the afflicted are not listened to... And they themselves soon sink into impotence in the use of language, because of the certainty of not being heard" (2000, 71)

III Relating Communicative Intent to Speech

All three interpretations of ‘to speak for oneself’ depend on the having the *capacity* to speak as an ‘I’. If I am the autonomous agent of my speech, to paint with broad strokes, then I may make any utterance I choose; I decide the subject and the predicate. Consider that most agential of all speech act types, the performative, which can only take as its subject the first person (singular, or in some cases plural). I now pronounce you, I do declare, I apologize, I praise thee. One may report another’s performative speech using second or third person pronouns, but the performative itself is contingent on agency. No one can issue my apology but me—a fact painfully obvious to anyone who has been forced to apologize against her will: her agency is intact but coerced, trapped. One whose power in society is undermined may not be able to freely make utterances which express her communicative intent, because her agency has been diminished. In such a case she may express her communicative intent by alternative means, since she is unable to do so using speech itself.

Spivak has noted that this limitation is experienced by Algerian women, who turn to ‘a-phonie’, a glossolalia-like expression in syllables not constituting utterances of a given language, because they feel that they are unable to express their concerns in French—a language built around the culture and needs of the colonizers, not those of the colonized (Spivak 2012, 230–31). Their inability to speak for themselves in the official language poses a crisis for the assumption that to listen to someone is to form a receptive relation to her speech as the site of the expression of her subjectivity. Speech, because of the confining parameters of a given language, cannot function as the site of their expressions of subjectivity. We may all feel this on a small scale when learning a foreign language: we can speak the words of the language, but it is a struggle to express ourselves in the language. Our communicative aims are frustrated. This does not mean that we have no communicative aims, of course; the failure of (a) language to function as the site of subjective expression by no means entails a loss of subjective intentionality. It is drastically insufficient to tie the relation of listening to someone only to the linguistic relation I have to her speech. A refugee who does not speak the national language may show up at an emergency room, gesticulating and miming; despite that she cannot speak for herself, she can communicate, and if the staff are willing to listen to her, to establish a relation of active receptivity to communicative intent of her gestures and sounds, they would make progress toward understanding what her need is and providing her with appropriate medical care.

The above are just a few examples of the everyday kinds of scenarios that can be viewed as following the paradigm of Echo's limited power of speech, but we do not stop with scenarios relating only to the limitations that arise from crossing or not crossing between languages. Even competent speakers may experience limited ability to express their communicative intent in their own language. Consider the options available to the characters in the myth: Narcissus can say things to Echo, about Echo. He can address her as 'you', make her the subject of a sentence, and sentence her to the predicate of his choice. She can perform no such functions, establishing another as her interlocutor by means of the second pronoun in the sense of Buber's I-thou relation. She cannot make him the grammatical subject, and sentence him to a predicate of her choosing. She can only say the words he gives her to say, which he could exploit if he were aware of her situation. Any judgements Narcissus makes of her she can either affirm with her echo, or she can mirror them back on him. She cannot refute them. She cannot suggest an alternative interpretation of herself.

These worries transpose easily to our familiar cultural context. Suppose Narcissus had made unwanted sexual advances, saying to Echo, "You know you want this." What can she say? She can echo his words, as if to agree, or as if to say, "You (Narcissus) want this." But she cannot say, "No I do not." She cannot say, "You are hurting me." She cannot self-advocate, and she cannot accuse. But she can no more author a you-sentence, informing someone else of her judgements of him, than she can speak for herself as agential assigner of predicates, as advocate for herself, or as author of her own testimony. These figurations have clear parallels in situations of people whose voices are socially disempowered or discounted. In a society where a woman's No is believed to be a Yes, can a woman speak for herself, communicating her intent in speech, if a man is not predisposed to listen to her refusal? It would seem that the difference between the man who takes her No as a No, and the man who takes her No as a Yes, is the difference between the man who listens to *her* communicative intent, and the one who refuses to listen to her.¹⁴

Not all communicative scenarios seem to have such fraught power dynamics as those mentioned above. What of scenarios that seem more neutral, where listening to someone is

¹⁴ There is more to be said about the meaning of listening in a similar encounter where the power differential is lessened: perhaps her voice and eyes give a more seductive message that belies her playful spoken No; likewise, a speaker who skillfully uses sarcasm will give two conflicting messages at once, and the listener's task is to understand the person's full intent by synthesizing both messages in proper balance. But as I am emphasizing the scenarios in which a speaker has less power than the listener, I do not treat these nuances in detail in the current project.

not a concept that seems to be in need of much explanation? Scenarios in which the speaking subject to whom I am listening is my peer or a superior, has language competence, and can easily express her communicative aims to me do not, on the surface, present the kind of ethical danger that resonates from a man's unwillingness to listen to a woman refusing his advances or from an emergency room staff refusing to listen to the communicative attempts of a refugee in need of care. Seemingly neutral situations can tend to obscure the meaning of 'to listen to someone' because many factors are implicit, rather than explicit. Consider a low-risk scenario: a professor is giving a lecture. The students may listen to her, or they may not, but the professor has power to give marks that reflect student performance, and so it is at risk to themselves, not to the professor, if they choose not to listen. Although we would usually say that the students are 'listening to her', the scene does not seem to suggest that there is a relation forming between the students and the communicative aims of the professor as an other, a subject trying to express herself. The professor's communicative aim is to transmit the contents of a curriculum.

Now introduce a reversal into the lecture scenario. Suppose the instructor is a doctoral student, who happens to be a young woman. Some of the male undergraduates refuse to listen to her because of who she is: they are not willing to be taught by a woman who seems barely older than they are. Although they may do all their work to a high standard through their independent efforts, they simply refuse to learn the material *from her*; they will not listen to her because they are unwilling to be taught by a young woman. The phenomenal feel of this scenario is quite different from the low-risk scenario of an established professor. We would not be surprised if she is incensed by the refusal of her students to listen to her.

No longer is the situation about transmitting the contents of a curriculum; by their refusal, the students made the situation about her as a subject, as a person. Their refusal hurts the instructor; harm is done because of a relation of listening that should have been established but was refused. In this way the refusal makes explicit the ethical structure of the relation, which was implicit in the previous scenario. Where there is an established communicative context, with the power difference known and understood by all participants, and the instructor has authority to speak and be listened to, and to penalize those who do not listen, then the situation does not seem to involve any explicit ethical concern for the subject who is speaking. It is uninteresting that she is listened to, and her subjectivity, her being a person requiring ethical consideration lest she be harmed, is backgrounded. Her subjectivity and the ethical risk posed by a refusal to listen to her as a speaking subject only come into

the foreground when a refusal is made. Therefore, even in seemingly neutral scenarios in which a subject can easily express her communicative intent through speech and be listened to without any dramatic ethical worries coming into view, the relation referred to as ‘listening to someone’ should be viewed as a relation that the listening subject forms with the speaking *subject*, not with the speech itself. By keeping the intersubjectivity in focus in this way, rather than basing the meaning of ‘to listen to someone’ on language processing, the account requires no modification when we shift to consider subjective communication expressed through non-linguistic means.

IV Relating Communicative Intent to Voice

As I have already indicated, there are times when someone is unable to use language to pursue their communicative aims, but is yet able to communicate. To listen to someone can mean, for instance, listening to their cries, as a mother does with her infant. I now turn to consider media of communicative action besides speech, by means of which someone may be seeking to be listened to.

First, let us consider the voice. In *For More Than One Voice*, Adriana Cavarero stresses the personality of the voice, which “*reveals* to the listener the vital and unrepeatable uniqueness of every human voice” (Cavarero 2005, 5 emphasis mine). A person’s voice is unique, and has the exact sonorance it does because of the shape and structure of the person’s vocal tract, from larynx to lips, and as such, its very sound is as much a unique personal signature as is the face. If you know me, then when you hear my voice, I do not need to articulate any words or linguistic contents for you to recognize and identify me by my voice. The very sonorous texture of my voice is a revelation of my body, of this throat and not someone else’s. Cavarero writes that the voice “is a deep vitality of the unique being who takes pleasure in revealing herself through the emission of the voice. The revelation proceeds, precisely, from inside to outside, pushing itself in the air, with concentric circles, toward another’s ear” (Cavarero 2005, 4).¹⁵ Where Cavarero uses the concept of revelation,

¹⁵ Cavarero situates the singularity of a human subject in the voice, while Levinas situates it with the look of the face. She writes of his view: “Bound to a verbal system of signification... the voice is perfectly suited to the role of signifying the ‘human fact’ of uniqueness before and beyond this system. And it is perhaps thanks to this prelogic self-signification of the vocal that one can say [as Levinas does] that the face speaks” (Cavarero 2005, 28). Cavarero’s and Levinas’s accounts are alike in that they emphasize the founding of the intersubjective relation as ‘pre-logic’, not as being linguistically mediated, but mediated more primordially by the encounter with the singularity of the other subject through the raw presence of her face (Levinas), voice (Cavarero), or possibly both. My account does not require me to choose one of these figurations over the other; rather, my account of listening is ecumenical, in that the other may appeal to me to listen to her as

we can trade in the concept of communication, of which revelation is a type. The voice communicates to the listener, and through the voice the listener communicates herself—her intents, her aims, her concerns—and the communication proceeds from inside to outside “toward another’s ear”.

Consider, for instance, the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Romeo under cover of night reveals his presence to Juliet, by speaking up but without identifying himself by his name. She recognizes him by the sound of his voice, as Paul Kottman describes in his introduction to Cavarero’s text (Cavarero 2005, xiii–xiv). Consider also the story from Hebrew tradition of the rivalry between twin brothers, Jacob and Esau. When Jacob, the younger, goes to his blind father Isaac in disguise to receive the blessing instead of his elder brother, he says to the blind man that he is Esau. The father doubts, because he correctly recognizes the voice as being Jacob’s. Jacob appeals to his disguise, inviting Isaac to feel his (goatskin-covered) arms to offer proof that he is his brother. Jacob receives the blessing and departs. Cavarero writes,

When Esau, who arrives too late, tells his father "I am your firstborn son Esau," Isaac in fact has no need for recourse to touch. The speech that says "I am Esau" is, in this case, indubitable. It is almost a redundancy, or a superfluous confirmation, of the voice of Esau. / The story also teaches us the difference between the voice and the register of speech... What makes the voice insufficient here is precisely the contradiction of the speech that it brings: "I am Esau," says the voice of Jacob. (Cavarero 2005, 24).

What can we gain from the observations about the inherently revelatory nature of the individual voice to support an account of what it means to listen to someone? To recognize someone by the sound of her voice is only possible when there is already an acquaintance. If listening is to attend not just to the content of a person’s words but to the way the person reveals herself through what she says, then listening would include making use of all that the vocal recognition of the other reveals.

If a mother hears her child say, “I am hungry,” then the words are heard not only as words but as the words of one who is her own child, her responsibility, dependent on her for food: the understanding of the words together with the recognition of the voice construe the utterance as a request for food. The listening mother must decide how to respond. If, however, a child hears her mother say, “I am hungry,” then the words are heard not heard as a request appealing to the hearer’s responsibility; the child is not responsible for feeding the mother. The words in this case may be simply a description of the mother’s state, or

well by what she does not say, as by what she says or by how she uses her voice to say it. Where the other addresses me, by look, by voice, or by silence (as in the next section), I am charged with listening to her.

perhaps as an apology to the child for the mother's impatience and harsh manner. If to listen to someone is to be responsive to the intent of their communication, or revelation, then the unique identity of the voice which speaks is important for understanding the full meaning of the utterance.

The same identification factor would apply by extension to writer's 'voice' as well; when one recognizes the unique stylistic patterns of a familiar author, whether in terms of recognizing the narrative voice of Tolstoy or recognizing from my mother's stylistic patterns in an email whether she is distressed, the identification of the author by his or her voice is interpretively important to understanding what, if anything, the text reveals of its author. Presumably, the email communication from my mother is a more revelation-oriented communicative act than is Tolstoy's novel. I do not seek to comment here on the literary question of the relationship of authors to their texts in the context of artworks. I would simply say that inasmuch as someone writes a text with the communicative intent to speak for themselves in such a way that they seek to be 'listened' to through their text, then reading can function as a subtype of listening, and the responsive activity which distinguishes listening to someone from failing to do so is analogous to the responsive activity of hermeneutics. I return to the subject of this analogue in the next chapter. It might be a stretch to say that if I read Tolstoy thoroughly, that I am listening to Tolstoy, the man himself. But if my mother emails me about an issue which is causing her anxiety, then I can 'listen' to her, by reading with a view to enabling the successful completion of her communicative aim and taking her account seriously, or I could refuse to listen, dismissing her worries as unimportant.

Written texts aside, the voice contains more communicative potential than simply accomplishing the identification of a speaker. We may note the familiar phenomenon that intonation patterns help distinguish how to interpret an utterance, as one tone pattern indicates a confident declaration; the same utterance pronounced with another tone pattern indicates an incredulous question. Furthermore, a speaker may manipulate standard intonation patterns to add emotive or affective information to her utterance, or to skew a standard meaning in a certain direction. For example, consider the way a gender-queer female might say, "I am a girl, but I am not a girl," where the first token of 'girl' is spoken with the standard intonation, but the second token is spoken in a higher, softer, fluty voice with a contouring pitch. The second token is sung in a way which communicates paralinguistically that although the language only offers a dichotomy of options, girl or boy, the

speaker applies to herself the concept girl while also rejecting a lot of what is contained in the society's concept of 'girl'. The utterance taken as a purely linguistic item would be contradictory and unable to transmit much information about the speaker. If, however, the para-linguistic features of the utterance are taken into account by the listener, the statement becomes not only coherent, but tremendously meaningful as an overt revelatory text.

More dramatic forms of vocal expression exist as well. A mourner who wails may be using words, or only sounds; nevertheless, it is the quality and contour of her vocal emission which reveals her grief. A mother who listens consistently to the cries of her infant can hear the difference between a fussy cry and a wail of acute, immediate need. Although the infant does not reveal herself through any linguistic encoding of information about her inner state, her voice reveals her status. One scenario worth considering is the variety of responses people have to a crying infant during a long flight. No one enjoys the sound of the cries, but there are those present who are forced to *hear* the cries and hear only a sonic intrusion that disrupts their sleeping or their entertainment. Others, such as the caregivers of the child, *listen* closely to the cries in order to discern what they can about the infant's status and attempt to meet the child's needs. One may also find strangers on the flight who are or have been caregivers for other infants, and have an impulse to *listen* for the meaning conveyed in the cries; such strangers are likely to be more compassionate than the strangers who do not know how to listen to the cries but merely hear them. A stranger who listens senses the infant's distress; a stranger who only hears, hears only an irritating intrusion of noise.

The cries of a mourner or an infant both point to a noteworthy feature of non-linguistic vocal revelation: whereas in listening to speech I mainly attend to *what* a person says, in listening to a voice I mainly attend to *how* the voice sounds. This is not irrelevant to speech, for listening to speech requires attending to both what is said and to the prosodic features, to the identifying voice and to how the voice is indicating intent (indicating sharp anger or gentle firmness, for example). The musicality of the voice, in speech or in cry, reveals qualitative and experiential information over and above what words may say. It is in this capacity of the voice to sing affect, to sing the 'how it feels' or the 'what it is like', that the communicative capacity of a person's voice sometimes includes having power to make the listener feel what the singer feels and to suffer what she suffers. The rising, tightening, cracking swell of the voice singing pain, the ringing triumph of the voice singing victory, and the plaintive wail of the voice singing the vast grief at the death of one's child reveal

the singer's experience to the listener with such force, that one must be significantly removed from the situation, or callous, to merely hear the vocalization without listening.

V Relating Communicative Intent to Silences and Omissions

Finally, let us consider the opposite end of the revelatory spectrum: when one is so hemmed in that she cannot speak for herself as an exercise of autonomy except by means of silences. Returning to the story of Echo, I proceed now from the implications of her punishment to the plot which unfolds thereafter. She watches a young man in the wood, Narcissus, and falls in love with him. She cannot speak to him on her own behalf or let him know of her love; she is limited to repeating back to him his own words. As Spivak notes in her analysis of the text, there comes a point where if Echo were to repeat back Narcissus' words to him, they would be in direct contradiction to Echo's interests. He has heard the echoing voice, but has not understood the situation, and speaks out to the source of the echoing voice, "Why do you fly from me?" In Latin, if Echo responds, "fly from me," it is impossible to distinguish whether the words are an interrogative or an imperative. Narcissus asked *why*, but Echo, saying only "Fly from me", cannot reproduce the interrogativity of his words; thus, he would hear an imperative, telling him to leave, when in fact, her desire is that he should stay and come nearer. Ovid thus does not write, in Latin, the words she echoes at this moment. This results in a silence in the text where the only possibility of utterance for Echo contravenes her will.

Although she cannot speak for herself and her own wishes, she does presumably have the possibility of omitting the words which are contrary to what she *would* say as an advocate, if her agency as a speaker were intact. Because she is Echo, the mythical figuration of the origin of the natural acoustic phenomenon of an echo, Ovid reports *that* she returned Narcissus' speech. But Spivak notes: "We remember that even if Echo had been able to echo and act according to mere punishment with no difference of subject-position, the response would have been a refusal to answer" (Spivak 2012, 228). Spivak's interpretation of the mythic scenario is that someone who is hemmed in by an inability to speak for herself may have the possibility of attempting to communicate by means of an omission of an expected response. A reporter interviewing a family that has recently gone through an intensely traumatic experience may ask questions which the family has no ability to answer at the time. Anything they say is likely to be misconstrued, and there is no way to communicate their pain. A reporter who is listening to the family, to their silences as well as their speech,

will hear clues in their silence that some questions should not be asked at this time and will change course. A reporter who refuses to listen will continue probing and prompting until he gets responses that satisfy him. Alternatively, one thinks of the classic instance where a lover says, “I love you,” and is not met with a reciprocal reply but with an icy, pointed silence.

To omit an expected reply can produce a meaningful silence, which reveals some aspect of disagreement between the intent of the expected reply and the intentions or interests of the silent party, giving clues to the communicative intentions or interests of that party. Gemma Corradi Fiumara notes:

...the ability to create a silence, and thus determine a new perspective, belongs to those who can speak in so far as speech represents a decision or a choice; silence is radically different, in this case, from an expressive inability or stuporous state of imposed muteness, just as the rituals of fasting would be difficult to envisage in a community that was always on the verge of starvation (1995, 99).

This phenomenon takes on increasingly dramatic proportions, the more a person like Echo, a ‘community... on the verge of starvation’, has extremely limited autonomy. In contexts of oppression and epistemic violence, a person’s voice may be silenced, her rights denied, and her capacity to make choices according to her own will eliminated. Such a person cannot speak for herself, since she has no ‘voice’, in an expanded sense of the term. She cannot advocate for herself, as she has no real rights. She cannot act as an agent, since she is governed by coercive systems. How can we listen to her? Spivak suggests that in such a context, a person whose autonomy is denied by the systems surrounding her may find a single action which can be autonomously chosen as a means of dramatically exerting, and thereby communicating, her autonomy, as if to say, “I am here too.” The example Spivak uses is the Hindu practice of *sati*, in which a woman whose husband has died chooses to ascend his funeral pyre and be burned along with his corpse.

I will not reproduce Spivak’s full discussion here, but her analysis argues that when a woman, whose autonomy is cancelled in society, chooses freely to commit suicide by *sati*, she is exerting her autonomy in the very act which finally ends her existence and swallows her last grain of autonomy. Because the woman is so ideologically trapped, “such a death can be understood by the female subject as an *exceptional* signifier of her own desire” (Spivak 1999, 96). I wrote above that to listen to someone who speaks for herself is to be a subject attending to the communicative intent of another speaking subject. It is difficult to say what sort of response would be desired of a ‘listener’ in the case of *sati*. Perhaps listening to the widow in her act of *sati* means becoming alert to the oppressive situation of other

women like her in her community, and to lend one's voice to their advocacy. This answer is speculative and insufficient, but it makes the point that even the most silenced of people should be listened to by whatever means possible, even if there seems to be little capacity or attempt to communicate by word or voice.

I have argued that to listen to someone is an intersubjective relation between a listening subject and a speaking subject, in which the speaker has an intent to communicate, and the listener's attention in some way facilitates the accomplishment of the speaker's communicative aims. I have argued that listening to someone is not confined to situations of socially powerful people speaking their cases linguistically to peers, but also extends to situations in which people with socially disempowered voices seek to communicate by any means, whether linguistic, vocal, or even pointedly silent. The vulnerability of a communicator means that to listen to her requires *more* active engagement from the recipient of the communicative act, rather than her vulnerability serving as an excuse for someone's failure to listen to her. In the next chapter I shift the focus to this engaged attitude of the listener, and in particular, the agential activity that must characterize listening in order for complaints about someone's refusal to listen to merit the moral force they seem to have. In order to be able to properly attribute responsibility to potential listeners for their willingness or refusal to listen to someone, it is necessary to diverge sharply from the tempting dichotomies in which utterance production is active, and reception is passive. By deconstructing this dichotomy, I redistribute the activity and responsibility for communication across both speakers *and* listeners. This redistribution of responsibility forms the basis for speakers' accusations of others' refusals to listen to them, and more particularly, opens the door for ethical critique when those in power refuse to listen to those with vulnerable voices.

CHAPTER 2: Redistributing Responsibility – the Agency of the Listener

Activities described as 'receptive' have an inevitable tendency, at least in English and in philosophical discourse generally, to be construed as passive. The person who speaks engages in an activity as an agent, and the listener is assumed to be merely a target at which the utterance is uttered. When being *receptive* takes this adjectival form, we tend to associate it with a non-active state. The opposite is true when we use a word with a more verb-like structure, as in the case of a person who plays the 'receiver' position in American football.

This person must be remarkably fast and astute in order to put himself where the ball is going to be, so that he can *receive* his teammate's pass. A receiving activity may well require a tremendous amount of agency and ability to anticipate the actions or needs of others. It is in this sense that I construe the receptive activity of listening: a receptivity which is active, requiring agency, energy, attention, and intentionality. In this chapter I turn to the issue of listening to one who is vulnerable, in which case listening to her is more particularly dependent on the activity of the listening subject, and less so on the strength of the communicative activity of the speaking subject.

For Socrates, as recounted by Plato in the dialogue called the *Phaedrus*, writing is the opposite of the paradigm of live speech, in which the speaker has full agency to accomplish his aims. Writing, by contrast, is weak, because the inert text must encounter the audience without the attendance of the speaker, and as such, the speaker has no power to ensure the successful completion of his communicative aims. This classic opposition, between the vitality of spoken word and vulnerability of written word, is where I locate my discussion of the agential receptivity involved in listening. Listening to a disempowered or silenced voice requires a kind of hermeneutic activity not unlike that involved in reading the text of an absent author. The dislocation of authorial power from a written text serves in this chapter as paradigmatic of all texts which are vulnerable candidates for the receptive attention of the listener. Jacques Derrida's classic deconstruction of the speaking/writing opposition, in his work "Plato's Pharmacy", establishes the precedent for shifting the locus of power in a communicative scenario out from the exclusive province of the speaker. Instead, communicator and audience both have some power over, and share responsibility for, ensuring the success of the communicative aims of a text. Derrida further argues that written texts are not only not weak, but are in fact very powerful, and although it is fascinating to contemplate the argument from analogy that could be made here, to say that those with socially disempowered voices have great subversive potential, this notion would be tangential to the main thrust of my account, so my argument from analogy only follows the responsibility redistribution element of Derrida's argument.

I proceed as follows: I lay out the Socratic dichotomy between text producers (both speakers and writers) as active and text receivers are viewed as passive. Through examination of the implications of Socrates' metaphors, this dichotomy appears in high relief, and following Derrida, I call this dichotomy into question. Derrida argues that texts of all kinds, both spoken and written, have both strengths and vulnerabilities, and that their

ultimate success can depend at least in part on what kind of reception they find with the audience. On this basis, I argue that an audience's receptive activity determines communicative success not only in the reading of written texts, but in any non-coercive communicative exchange. The active engagement of a reader, in the metaphorical images of Socrates' and Derrida's claims, follows a pattern of hospitality, and the reader's hospitality to a (relatively vulnerable) text serves as a pattern for the listener's active engagement with a (potentially disempowered) speaking subject. In this way I construe listening not as a passive activity, but as an agential activity for which listeners are responsible and which structures the way a listener attends to a speaker. Therefore, if a person with a disempowered voice fails to accomplish her communicative aims, the listener *can* be held responsible for a refusal to actively engage in the hospitality of listening to her.

I Images of Animal and Cadaver

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates is speaking with a young man, Phaedrus, who is enamored with a new trend of speechwriting. Socrates is opposed to this view, and argues that the writing of speeches cannot compare to the power of spoken oratory, since the written speeches are fixed, uncontextualized, and are often read out by someone other than the author of the speech. Socrates explains:

I cannot help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence. And the same may be said of [written] speeches. You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to one of them, the speaker always gives one unvarying answer. And when they have been once written down they are tumbled about anywhere among those who may or may not understand them, and know not to whom they should reply, to whom not: and, if they are maltreated or abused, they have no parent to protect them; and they cannot protect or defend themselves (Plato 1999, 92).

Once a written document has been made, its content is fixed. Whatever clarifying questions or objections one may have toward the text, the text can only ever repeat 'one unvarying answer', for the text says what it says on the page. Unlike in a conversation, in which a person can be asked for explanations or reasons to clarify and validate their claims, and in which a speaker can design a speech to persuade a particular audience, knowledge that has been written down—the 'intelligence' a document contains—is unable to elaborate on its ideas. It cannot defend its perspective. It cannot tailor itself to have maximum impact on a given audience. The only way to question what a text means is by requesting further texts from the author, who could potentially write a follow up text or could give an interview. But

the text, by itself, cannot answer when it is called into question.¹⁶ All this fits logically with the way we talk about a written text, as an ‘it’ which has no agency or living presence, as opposed to the way we would talk about a speaker, as ‘she’ or ‘he’. A speaker can speak, modify, answer, and explain. A text just sits fixed to the page on which it is inscribed. This fixity of writing earns it a rebuke from Socrates as something silent (like paintings), subject to use or abuse, and defenseless given the absence of the author to guide his points home in the face of questions and objections.

Likewise, any utterance or text of someone with a disempowered voice is defenseless. If such a person’s utterances are called into question by an interlocutor or audience, the person’s ability to explain or defend her claims is limited. One thinks of the iconic scenario in which a distraught wife tries to explain to her abusive husband that she is upset because he is harming her, but he dismisses her utterances as hysterical. Charging her with being hysterical is a way of calling into question the legitimacy of the meaning of her utterances. The harder she tries to validate her message, the more her actions ‘confirm’ his view: she is distraught, hysterical, and should be shushed. She cannot shepherd her message, not because she is absent like the author, but because her voice is powerless against the label by which her husband calls her utterances into question. She is not like Socrates’s powerful orator, father of a text able to answer on its behalf when it is interrogated. The metaphor of the absent author as a missing parent is an image loaded with implications, which are expounded by Derrida; we will come to that discussion in the next section.

Socrates connects the notion of the fixed silence of written texts to the idea that they are not alive, unlike “the living word of knowledge which has a soul, and of which the written word is properly no more than an image” (Plato 1999, 93). It is easy enough to say that the written word is just an image, a fossil, of the ‘living word of knowledge’. Derrida elaborates:

...Plato is following certain rhetors and sophists before him who, as a contrast to the cadaverous rigidity of writing, had held up the living spoken word, which infallibly conforms to the necessities of the situation at hand, to the expectations and demands of the interlocutors present, and which sniffs out the spots where it ought to produce itself, feigning to bend and adapt at the moment it is actually achieving maximum persuasiveness and control (Derrida 1988, 79).

¹⁶ In the Socratic text, the context is oratory. Socrates is concerned about when one reads a speech which the audience does not understand, does not agree with, or resists with doubts, for which reason they might question or interrogate the unanswering text. I phrase this response as ‘calling into question’, to unify the reader’s confusion or objections, and a poor listener’s quickness to doubt or undermine a speaker’s view, in anticipation of the discussion in Chapter 3 of Levinas’s account of the way that, in the intersubjective relation, we call each other into question.

Here we find the second part of our first set of metaphors: whereas spoken *logos* is a living animal, the written text is a cadaver. As above, when the *logos* is attended by its father—that is, the speaker giving life to the words of the discourse—it possesses the adaptability and flexibility of a living creature, because a living creature is steering and adapting her participation in the discourse to the needs and susceptibilities of the audience. A written text has no such flexibility. Even in a situation in which an author reads her own text to an audience, the author is tied to the fixed sequence of words on the page: the content of the discourse is not living and adaptable, but pinned, like a butterfly in a museum display case. If she departs from the fixed text, then she is no longer reading, and living word takes over from the cadaver-text.

All other things being equal—merit of the text’s content, organizational structure, and finesse of articulation—a living discourse is held in opposition to, and superior to, a written text. The spoken discourse is an animal, and the written text its cadaver. The spoken discourse is supervised, flexible, immediate, and animated by the living knowledge of the speaker. The written text, in the stiffness of death, is unable to adapt to the immediate needs of a situation and, being unsupervised, cannot defend or answer itself. Socrates even suggests that the knowledge contained in a written text, being thus disconnected from an individual’s live understanding, is subject to ‘abuse’ by unqualified readership (Plato 1999, 83). But this is picture oddly out of sync with the way that texts actually function. It is true that irresponsible readers may abuse texts, imposing unfaithful interpretations for their own ends, or that a text may be disregarded when it fails to find its mark. But a text may also pass from reader to reader, reaching much further afield than an author’s own travels, for far longer than her lifespan. A text may be translated, or be unearthed by new scholars, and it would seem that the depth of meaning which readers discover in a text may accrue indefinitely.

Similarly, a skilled parent may be able to exegete and articulate significant meaning from the babbles and cries of her baby or toddler, or a lover may draw reservoirs of meaning from the cold silence of his partner in the face of his advances. No, my intuition would say that the life of a written or disempowered text is not more finite than that of a ‘living discourse’, which must cease when the privileged speaker’s life comes to an end. A cadaver decays; it gets smaller. The reach of a written text expands and its meaning accrues with each significant new reading, and although it is not living in the way that a spoken discourse is, we might say that the afterlife of writing is fruitful and potentially limitless. Neither

Plato—the scribe of Socrates—nor Derrida was oblivious to the ambivalence of texts, and I turn now to a second set of textual metaphors, which bring that ambivalence to light.

II Orphan and Ghost

As I cited above, Socrates mentions the concern that writings, given the absence of the author, are vulnerable to abuse or, more simply, to missing their marks:

And when they have been once written down they are tumbled about anywhere among those who may or may not understand them, and know not to whom they should reply, to whom not: and, if they are maltreated or abused, they have no parent to protect them; and they cannot protect or defend themselves (Plato 1999, 92).

To take the metaphor at face value, it does not follow from the absence of a child's parent that the child is dead; it follows from the absence of the child's parent that the child is orphaned.¹⁷ The vulnerability of orphanhood does not necessarily spell death. A spoken discourse makes a successful entry into society under the guidance of a father. A written text may be unsupervised and undefended, but this does not entail that a written text does not remain among the living in a way which, however vulnerable, does retain a capacity to transmit ideas. Likewise, the utterances of the disempowered may lack an authoritative, status-giving voice to defend them, but their limitations do not entail that they have *no* capacity to transmit contents. The contents transmitted by a written text depend for their reception on the receptive activity of an assiduous reader. Likewise, the contents transmitted by a disempowered voice depend on the receptive activity of the audience, if the audience is listening.

Derrida picks up on the ambivalence of this weakened state, and expands for us on the lot of the orphaned text as opposed to the accompanied sonship of the spoken *logos*:

The status of this orphan, whose welfare cannot be assured by any attendance or assistance [by the father, or “speaking subject”], coincides with that of a *graphein* which, being nobody's son at the instant it reaches inscription, scarcely remains a son at all and no longer *recognizes* its origins, whether legally or morally. In contrast to writing, living *logos* is alive in that it has a living father (whereas the orphan is already half dead), a father that is *present*... (Derrida 1988, 77).

The *graphein*, the discourse which is orphaned in writing, has suffered a loss of immediacy in terms of its connection to its source.¹⁸ Again, the welfare of an orphan cannot be assured,

¹⁷ Or, if the child has a mother but is lacking a father, the child is a bastard rather than an orphan in Socratic terms, as Derrida points out (1988, 85). Of course we do well to recognize a wide array of possible circumstances of parental absence, but for purposes of the present paper, I only follow the archetypal imagery of the orphan, which captures the functional vulnerability of one who lacks patronage.

¹⁸ This loss of immediacy and other concerns of the relationship of an author to his text, particularly in texts as artworks rather than, say, letters, are discussed in Roland Barthes' “The Death of the Author” (in Barthes 1977, 142–48) and Michel Foucault's “What is an Author” (in Foucault 1977, 113–38). Since the revelatory

which does not entail that the orphan is dead, but is vulnerable. Derrida jumps to the interpretation that the orphan is ‘already half dead’, since an orphan with no patronage has limited socioeconomic options for survival. Half dead is better than all dead, it would seem: a vulnerable but resourceful orphan may find any number of opportunities to prosper her or his life by appealing to the hospitality of others. An infant cry, an Echo-like omission or *sati* silence, or the political plea of the suffragette may find opportunities to prosper in the transmission of contents by finding the ear of an active, earnestly receptive listener. Likewise, an ‘unpatronized’ discourse may find its way as a written piece into any number of hospitable readers’ hands to transmit its message. If the writing finds sufficient favor it may make its way among readership that would have been far outside the reach of its father, finding audience in places, in languages, and centuries widely removed from its inception. Socrates does not follow his metaphor of the fatherless text into an in-depth exposition of the orphaned status of writing, but he does leave room for the possibility that some written texts may be more resourceful orphans than others—more adept at finding hospitable reception.¹⁹ ‘...there is no disgrace in the mere fact of writing... The disgrace begins when a man writes not well, but badly’ (Plato 1999, 70). When a man writes well, the fate of writing may not be quite so grim as that of the average sophist’s speech. But before I turn to the matter of this qualitative difference in the next section, there is another metaphor which Derrida conjures out of the text, which is relevant here.

If the living *logos* is an animal, and the *logos* lacking parentage is an orphan which is vulnerable or half dead but not entirely dead, then what is to be made of the stronger notion that the fixed rigidity of a text is rather like a cadaver’s rigor mortis? For all that the body of the text itself is fixed to the page, the afterlives of texts are not to be overlooked. Derrida’s deconstruction of the Socratic dichotomy yields the idea that rather than pitting speech against writing in an either/or,

or self-disclosing role of literary texts, particularly works of fiction, is far less straightforward, it is an open question whether in reading a novel, one ought to be ‘listening to the author’ in the same sense that is the basis of my account.

¹⁹ By way of example, consider the number of women who wrote texts under male pseudonyms, in order that their texts would be hospitably received. Through this ‘resourceful’ strategy, the texts would be evaluated on the basis of content instead of being shut out on the basis of the sex of the author, and if the texts were written well, they would attain broader distribution among more assiduous, more actively receptive readership. But a terribly written text or a text containing useless ideas, even if written by a respectable author, would not likely gain extensive readership. The better a text (the more resourceful the orphan), the more likely it is to find hospitable reception, on this view.

There is only a *logos* more or less alive, more or less distant from itself. Writing is not an independent order of signification; it is weakened speech, something not completely dead: a living-dead, a reprieved corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath (Derrida 1988, 143).

The orphan is vulnerable; the written text is 'more or less alive'. In being distanced from the authorial patronage which produced it, the written text is 'more or less distant from itself'. The written text is not, strictly speaking, dead, as Socrates suggested. Amidst the descriptions listed in the citation above, Derrida goes on to name what writing *is*: a ghost. He mentions early in his essay that the speech of sophists were typically ghost-written (1988, 68), and the affinity between a ghost-written speech and a work whose genuine author is known but absented from the content of the work by its production in written form is not lost from view. A ghost, which does indeed resemble breath, remains in the land of the living in the aftermath of the death of the father-author and continues to haunt and cry out into the lives of those who cross paths with the it.

Whereas orphaned writings were called vulnerable, a ghost may be called tenacious: it is hard to kill what is already dead. This figuration suits the intuition I mentioned above, that despite the interpretive abuse which an incompetent reader may inflict on a text, the fixed, rigid text remains available to future readers. And although a negligent audience may refuse to listen to the utterances of the disempowered with earnestness, they do not void the meaning of such utterances: their refusal to listen does not exonerate them from whatever charges or pleas may have been contained therein. The abusive husband may dismiss his wife's claims that his treatment of her is harmful, and yet his dismissal does not entail that her claims were untrue, nor that her claims will not haunt him even after he dismisses them and silences her.

We now have two pairs of metaphors on the table. A living *logos*-animal is contrasted to the rigid cadaver of a written text, and writing is cast two ways: as a vulnerable but living orphan, and as a tenacious-in-death ghost. I turn now to the shift of responsibility for written text reception to the province of the reader, and the corresponding shift of responsibility for successful spoken communication to the active receptivity of the listener and to the listener's predisposition of willingness or refusal to listen.

III The Text's Dependence on the Receiver

In the *Phaedrus*, the conversation between Socrates and Phaedrus is, on the surface, concerned with evaluating the merits of a speech Phaedrus brought from his friend Lysias (Plato 1999, 42–44), which would be a pointless exercise if written speeches were entirely

problematic to begin with. But as Derrida emphasizes, if writing is a *pharmakon*, then it is by nature ambivalent, both a remedy and a poison (Derrida 1988, 70). As Socrates acknowledges, “Any one may see that there is no disgrace in the mere fact of writing... The disgrace begins when a man writes not well, but badly” (Plato 1999, 70). If there is a meaningful difference between venom and antivenin, between a well written text and one badly written, then we already have room for taking writing as more ambivalent than a classic speech/writing dichotomy might suggest (Derrida 1988, 85). If the play of metaphors left us with an ambivalent pair of depictions of writing, as orphaned and vulnerable animal but also as tenacious ghost, then the next step is to tease through what resources this orphan does and does not have, and what strengths and weaknesses the ghost may draw upon, as figures of both written and spoken communication.

Beginning with the orphan image, the charge leveled against writing above is that, like a silent painting, a written text may be a repetition of knowledge, but it is not a living understanding, and cannot adapt itself to an audience or answer to interrogation. Socrates answered ‘yes’ when Phaedrus asked, “You mean the living word of knowledge which has a soul, and of which the written word is properly no more than an image?” (Plato 1999, 93). To accuse writing of being merely an image of knowledge is, at the same time, to credit writing with the capacity of being an image of knowledge. This ambivalent attribution shows up in Socrates’ praise of oratory:

Oratory is the art of enchanting the soul, and therefore he who would be an orator has to learn the differences of human souls--they are so many and of such a nature, and from them come the differences between man and man... But when he understands what persons are persuaded by what arguments, and sees the person about whom he was speaking in the abstract actually before him, and knows that it is he... (Plato 1999, 87).

The superiority of the spoken word in Socrates’ opposition is that the speaker, being present, has the opportunity to leverage his understanding of his rhetorical content as well as of the dispositions of his audience in order to tailor his arguments to those dispositions. The audience will be most persuaded by a rhetorician who has a good understanding of which arguments will find recognition by the audience, in virtue of what they already know and understand, and presumably their motives and agendas as well.

There is more to the power of oratory, though, than mere salesmanship. It is not simply that the orator knows what arguments will dupe the audience; rather, the orator knows the dispositions, and in knowing dispositions, knows the prior knowledge of the audience. What the audience already knows, in terms of genuine, living knowledge, will

affect their responses to his arguments. Consider the story Socrates told early in the *Phaedrus* about how different souls are disposed to recognize different aspects of truth depending on their individual prehistories of ‘seeing’ different divinities:

For a man must have intelligence of universals, and be able to proceed from the many particulars of sense to one conception of reason;—this is the recollection of those things which our soul once saw while following God—when regardless of that which we now call being she raised her head up towards the true being (Plato 1999, 60).

There are two notions of truth at play in the *Phaedrus*: there is the divine intelligence which an immortal soul brings with it into the world, and there is also the learned intelligence of practical knowledge. When a person encounters truth—*aletheia*, which can also be translated as ‘unforgetting’—the person does not just learn, but recognizes (re-cognizes) the truth. What truth a person is predisposed to recognize is a matter of their soul’s prehistory—a matter to which writing is not sensitive, since the text remains the same regardless of which soul is reading it.

The insight to be harvested from this mythology of predisposition is that how a person will respond to different arguments will be dependent on what they, the listener, are predisposed to understand, in virtue of the knowledge they have collected in life and the preparation of their soul, which can be cashed out from metaphor to actuality as the character and motives of the listener. For Socrates, this amounted to a distinct advantage of the spoken word’s targeting flexibility:

...even the best of writings are but a reminiscence of what we know, and that only in principles of justice and goodness and nobility taught and communicated orally for the sake of instruction and graven in the soul, which is the true way of writing, is there clearness and perfection and seriousness, and that such principles are a man’s own and his legitimate offspring... (Plato 1999, 95).

Once again, the sword cuts both ways. While an author cannot sculpt a text differently for each individual reader’s soul, a given writing will be a reminiscence of what a wide array of people know: people across times and places, far outside the human reach of the author, may have certain ‘principles of justice and goodness and nobility... graven in the soul’ and in this way may find in the work of writing the ‘reminiscence’ or unforgetting of the truth which their souls know. If an orator has an audience of fifty, and speaks so as to target the reminiscence of what a majority of them know, then, say, forty people may be reminded of the truth graven in their souls. If the same speech is written and passed down through the millennia, translated into a multitude of languages, a far greater number of people will encounter that text and find in it a reminiscence of the truth. What Socrates posits as the ‘true way of writing’ is the encoding of truths engraved in the author’s soul so that they may

be recognized and remembered by other souls in whom they are also already engraved. If this picture is considered seriously in light of the role of audience responsibility, the implication is that audiences who already agree or are prepared to agree with the contents of the text will be those with whom the text most successfully communicates. By extension, a speaker will have the most communicative success when potential listeners are already predisposed to agree. This is an advantage for the powerful orator in politics, but it is a tragic prospect for the speaker with a disempowered voice, who, on this view, will only be listened to when her message is of the sort which her interlocutors are predisposed to welcome.

Consider once more the abusive husband: if he calls into question his wife's message, she is not empowered to answer to this questioning except by repeating claims and demonstrations of the distress which he has already named illegitimate. But if instead he were to think, "Why is she saying that she is being harmed? I did not think I was harming her, but what if I am?" If the discord between his predisposition to understand the situation in his favor and the contents of her communication is taken as calling *him* into question, then he as an active recipient must begin by questioning his own predisposed view in order to understand her, and only if he fails to find a way to understand her message would he consider questioning the coherence of her view (perhaps she is, after all, sleep deprived and lacking coherence for the time being). The text's communicative success rides on whether the interlocutor listens: that is, works actively to receive the communication, even to the point of calling his own views into question, before passing any judgement on the communication or communicator.

What Socrates frames as the weakness of a written text is that it will only be successfully received by those whose souls are predisposed to recognize the truth it contains. While his notion of predisposition is tied to an assumption about the underlying inequality between people, some of whom are more capable of understanding truth than others, we can take the concept of predisposition seriously as referring not only to intellectual capacity and education, but to a person's openness to certain claims. A person who is predisposed to be open to or to welcome strange new ideas is a person whose predisposition is hospitable. A reader of a text containing difficult or complicated truths may approach with curiosity, energy, and a desire to understand, and so may come to understand quite challenging texts, while readers who are not so hospitable will seek out texts which are easy to understand or which confirm their views. The concept of predisposition, taken seriously, points us to the role which a reader or listener plays in structuring the communicative success of a text or

utterance. Communicative success in any medium is determined at least in part by the predispositions of the audience, both in terms of their competence and their willingness to receive the information or view which is the speaker's communicative intent. In the next section I argue that listeners are responsible for the predispositions with which they approach a communicative situation, and that a listener who is not predisposed to show hospitality to the needy 'orphan' claims of a speaking subject with a disempowered voice is therefore responsible for his or her own failure to listen.

IV Hospitality for the Orphan

Now, the concept of predisposition came into the discussion in connection with the idea that a text or speech contains knowledge, which will be grasped only by those audiences whose souls already glimpsed that knowledge in prehistoric time (the Socratic myth) or who already possess the sufficient knowledge of the material contained in the text to be able to understand the point the text is making (Derrida's interpretation of Socrates). Derrida says, "Writing thus only intervenes at a time when a subject of knowledge already possesses the signifieds, which are then only given to writing on consignment" (Derrida 1988, 135). In this picture, the variable at play is the capacity of the recipient of the communication to understand its content—that is, the main question influencing communicative success is whether the audience is up to successfully understanding the intent of the communicator. The listener may lack capacity to receive. Implicit in the picture is the assumption that the speaker/author has the capacity to communicate the content in question.

Before I discuss the reverse situation, in which the communicator lacks capacity to ensure communicative success and the listener is the one who has the means to ensure her success, consider the issue of audience incompetence. Using Derrida's terms (above): a text is a signifier, but it communicates its message successfully *only* if I already have knowledge of what is signified. By analogy, if you speak to me about the parts of a car's engine, I will not understand the meaning of your utterances (signifiers), because I have no understanding of engines and their parts (the signifieds). Your signifiers may all be in order, correctly describing what is causing the engine to malfunction and how it should be fixed, but I will discover no truth in your words, because, lacking knowledge of the signifieds (the engine parts and their functions), I am an inadequate listener. The success of a correct and truthful communication is, in this case, compromised by my failure of receptivity. I am an

incompetent audience, lacking the predisposition necessary for your communicative aims to be accomplished.

Audience competence is a term borrowed from the work of Kristie Dotson.²⁰ She has argued that a speaker can be silenced when an audience is incompetent to understand the speaker's testimony, especially if the audience does not have an accurate gauge of their own degree of competence (see Dotson 2011). I know very accurately that I am an incompetent audience for texts about car engines, and as such, if I were to attempt to listen to your testimony about what you have done to fix my car, then I must deploy a tremendous amount of my own resources in active reception of your text in order to understand you. But if I attempt to listen in this way and fail to understand you, then I must assume that I am the one responsible for the failed communication, since I am an incompetent listener. Similarly, if I do not understand a medical textbook, I assume that responsibility for the failure is mine as an incompetent audience, not that the author has been a communicative failure. These examples follow the power structure of Socrates' arguments, in which the speaker aims to communicate some bit of knowledge, but the success of the communication is prevented because I, the audience, lack the predisposition, that is, the competence, to understand. Hence, the audience is responsible for the failed communication.

But now, consider the reverse power structure, in which a speaker possesses knowledge which she seeks to communicate, but she is in a socially disempowered position. A powerful audience lacks the predisposition, in terms of audience competence, to grasp the speaker's communicative intent. The communication fails because of the incompetence of the listener. As above, the responsibility, and so also the fault, for the failure of the communication should presumably be placed on the listener, as the only factor that has changed is the relative social power of the speaker to that of the audience. Consider the following scenario: I am a white woman serving as a judge for a trial in which a black woman is accusing a police officer of violence towards her. The defendant repeatedly points out that the woman is enraged, irrational, hysterical, and that her accusations cannot be believed. The woman speaks in African American Vernacular English (also called Ebonics, or

²⁰ Kristie Dotson's work is part of a wider literature in social epistemology—a literature which dovetails very nicely with the account I am giving of listening. I only mention Dotson here, but the next step of my project will be to bridge my so far largely Continental account with analytic literatures in social epistemology and philosophy of language, and, using their resources, to build a companion account of the mechanisms of this activity of listening, particularly with regard to the listener's active use of concepts in grasping or screening out the speaker's communicative intent.

AAVE). Supposing that I, the judge, have a difficult time understanding AAVE, and I have learned to associate the sounds of AAVE with ignorance and irrationality. I am an incompetent audience of the woman's testimony: I cannot grasp her meaning, and I struggle to interpret her believability from her tone. If this communication fails, is she or I responsible? In the sense in which Socrates uses the term 'predisposition', I am the one who lacks the predisposition of *knowledge* necessary to properly process the communication. I am responsible for the failed communication, because I lack competence with AAVE. Moreover, taking seriously the notion of predisposition in referring to an recipient's active role in understanding a communication, I am responsible for the success or failure of the woman's testimony on account of my predisposition of *willingness* to take responsibility for the success of her communication.

To return to the terms of the metaphor, her vulnerable testimony is like an orphan: it lacks a 'father', or in this case the social authority, to defend it, vouch for it, or legitimize it. The woman lacks the means to ensure her communicative success by, for example, speaking in a more 'standard' variety of English. I, as the judge, am not lacking in resources or means to ensure the success of my own communications. I have social power. I have a gavel. We might say that the testimony of woman, being part of a disenfranchised minority in American society, is much like an orphan in need of hospitality. If I am predisposed in terms of willingness to see her communication succeed, then I could take responsibility and offer to use my resources for her welfare. This hospitality may take the form of being honest enough to recognize my own incompetence as an audience, and to devote extra energy and attention to ensuring that I have understood her. It may take the form of ensuring that there are other AAVE speakers on the jury, and if not, firing the jury and hiring a new one that includes jurors who *are* a competent audience and will be predisposed (in terms of knowledge) to grasp the full intent of her communication.

Hospitality, in the ordinary sense of the term, is what happens when one person offers their home or their food to a person who is not ordinarily a part of the household, who does not possess a standing claim to use of those resources. Whether the guest has their own household and resources somewhere, or has none, hospitality refers to the *willingness* to offer one's own resources to the guest who is in need of them. In the courtroom scenario, the communicative success of the woman's testimony depends on the predisposition of willingness, or the *hospitality* of the judge to use her own resources on behalf of the woman in need. The way a person actively engages with a speaker's communication in order to

grasp the person's intent follows this structure of hospitality. The one who *listens* to the speaker is the one who takes responsibility for facilitating the other person's communicative success. The one who refuses to listen is the one who refuses to offer hospitality to the speaker. When a person who is in need seeks hospitality and finds a door closed in her face, we are in a position to be able to pass judgement on the one who left the needy person in the street. It is this pattern of refusal of hospitality which is reflected in our outrage when someone refuses to listen to us, particularly when the person obviously possesses the predisposition in terms of knowledge to understand our meaning. Since they are so obviously capable of understanding, the reason for the failed communication would seem to lie in the person's unwillingness to show hospitality.

The ostensible critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* contains within itself subtle gestures in the direction of the ambivalence of written texts, which are dead but have rich afterlives, and being weak, as orphans, have the power to speak to the hospitable reader outside the political discourse of the day, with its biases and limitations. Derrida's deconstruction of the *Phaedrus* seizes on this subtle ambivalence and inverts the dichotomy between speech and writing, to suggest that perhaps writing has power to speak after all, but that it is dependent both on the skill of the writer and on the receptive activity and predispositions of the audience. I have argued that this split responsibility applies both to spoken and written texts, and that in both cases the communicative success of a text is partially dependent on the receptive activity and predisposition of the audience. As such, the act of listening to someone is not a matter of merely passively hearing and then calling into question what someone says, but of actively seeking to understand someone's message, even to the point of letting the message call the listener into question, before passing judgement on the text and speaker. This is particularly important with regard to speakers who have disempowered voices, because placing responsibility for the reception of their speech on the receiver allows us to see the difference between those who choose to listen, and those who, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the speaker, refuse to listen. In the following chapter I turn to the matter of the phenomenological stances we take toward others, which underly the praise and blame that can be given for listening or refusing to listen, forming the basis for an account of the ethics of hospitality.

CHAPTER 3: The Phenomenology of Listening to Someone

What does hospitality have to do with phenomenology? So far, I have followed Derrida's development of the metaphoric theme of vulnerable utterances as being orphan-like, and as such, their thriving depends on the reception they find. I have labeled the welcoming reception 'hospitality' because when one is confronted with a vulnerable 'other', such as someone outside one's family, community, or otherwise outside someone's direct remit of social responsibility, one can either receive the person with welcome and offer one's own resources to the cause of the other's welfare, or one can refuse to show the person such a welcome. Refusals are made with arguments claiming that the other is not one's responsibility; that the other is unknown and could pose a risk to the household, or that members of the household should not suffer or go without for the sake of a stranger.

The concept of hospitality, at root, points to someone's willingness to welcome a guest (Greek *hospes*) with one's own means, even if that poses a risk to the host. In this chapter I bring the content of Derrida's lectures, published in *Of Hospitality* (Derrida 2000), into the discussion of receptiveness towards the utterances of vulnerable others as a key component of listening. This fuller account of hospitality in listening as a type of stance of receptivity in turn begs a fuller account of stances of receptivity to others, as grounded not just in social relations but in the underlying phenomenology of intersubjective relations. Levinas's ethics of hospitality, as developed in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Levinas 1969) and in his essay "Ethics as First Philosophy" (Levinas 1989), provides the groundwork for my argument that listening—being a communicative relation characterized by hospitality—gains its structure from an underlying intersubjective relation characterized by hospitality. Inasmuch as the demand for hospitality at the intersubjective level is the basis for human ethics, likewise communicative relations are circumscribed by an ethical demand for hospitality through listening.

I Conceptualizing Hospitality

Derrida distinguishes between hospitality as a social custom, in which expectations of and limits to hospitality may vary across communities, and the absolute notion of hospitality which underlies the various manifestations of the principle. Since I am not interested in cultural customs of visitation, but in hospitality as a principle which founds relations of receptivity, I begin from Derrida's description of absolute hospitality:

Let us say *yes to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female (Derrida 2000, 77).

The opening words point to the structure of the stance of hospitality: a ‘who’ or a ‘what’ turns up, becomes present to my awareness in some manner, and upon the turning up of this who or what, I say yes. I say yes to the existence of the who or what, and to its presence with me, and to whatever demands its presence places on me. To say that a who or a what *turns up* is to say that the other has not been present within the horizons of my awareness as an existent, or as an existent in need of some response for me. The other turns up: this is the epiphany, the becoming apparent to me which occurs when someone knocks on my front door, or calls out to me in the street, or says to me, “I need to tell you something.”

We can assume that the other has already been existing prior to her turning up, and I may or may not have known of her existence; in any case, her existence did not concern me. This is the paradigm of the foreigners in their own country: I know they exist, that they are over there in their own place, but they do not concern me. But when one of them *turns up* in my presence, be she a traveler in need of directions or lodging, or a refugee in need of asylum, she shifts from existing beyond my horizons of awareness, to existing within the horizon of my awareness, and in virtue of this shift she requires some response from me. “May I stay? Will you help me?” Julia Kristeva articulates the appeal of the foreigner’s presence thus: “the foreigner challenges both the identity of the group and his own—a challenge that few among us are apt to take up. A drastic challenge: ‘I am not like you.’ An intrusion: ‘Behave with me as you would among yourselves.’ A call for love: ‘Recognize me.’ In all that there is a mixture of humility and arrogance, suffering and domination, a feeling of having been wounded and being all-powerful” (Kristeva 1991, 42). The familiar dual status of the guest as one of both lowliness and height is at the heart of Levinas’s account of the intersubjectivity—a theme to which I will return in due course.

The other’s appearance—the epiphany of her turning up within my horizons—is solely sufficient for establishing a moment which will or will not be characterized by hospitality. Either I say yes to her, whatever identity, need, and request she may happen to have, or I refuse to say yes and turn away the one who turns up. As Derrida notes, absolute hospitality does not operate on conditions, on the identification of the other (as my concern or not) or the determination of the other (as safe or not, as worthy or not) (Derrida 2000, 27–28), of whether the other is alive or dead, animal or cadaver or ghost, orphan or son.

Hospitality operates on the turning up of the other, no questions asked. Absolute hospitality does not conduct an interrogation to determine whether or not to say yes to the one who turned up; hospitality simply says yes to the one who turns up.

This description of absolute hospitality emphasizes its unconditional nature, saying yes to whoever turns up; but what exactly is meant by ‘saying yes’? Derrida’s phrasing is clearly meant to evoke a richer meaning than merely verbally saying “Yes” to someone:

To put it in different terms, absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names (Derrida 2000, 25).

Moving from the concrete paradigm of hospitality, the opening of one’s home to someone, to the broader meaning of the concept, Derrida describes hospitality as *giving place* to someone. In the foreigner context, giving place involves giving entry privileges to the foreigner by issuing a visa or granting asylum, and possibly also granting them permission to work and to take advantage of social benefits: to have a place in society. In the hospitality industry, giving place is the offering of a room or a bunk to a paying lodger. In the houseguest context, giving place would refer to giving a visitor a place at the table and a plate of food, and possibly also giving them use of a bed or couch. In many cultures, it is expected that conscientious hosts would give up use of their own beds, and sleep elsewhere for the sake of the guest; this practice references the possibility hospitality always raises that giving place to a guest may result in the host being *dis-placed*, or facing loss on account of welcoming the guest. I will return to the issue of displacement shortly.

In communicative relations, we can say that the listening subject is one who gives place to (says yes to) someone who speaks. To borrow Levinas’s phrasing: “Words are said, be it only by the silence kept, whose weight... rather than letting be, solicits the Other” (Levinas 1969, 195). When someone turns up within my horizons, solicits my response to whatever it is they have to communicate, hospitality is the response which agrees to give place to her communication. I may give place to an adult by taking the time to listen thoughtfully to what she tells me in words, or I may give place to an infant by investing energy in the effort to identify the need behind her cry and to meet that need. I may give place to a disgruntled partner by taking seriously her loaded silences, giving allowance for what she is saying ‘between the lines’ that she struggles to say to me in words.

The examples just given illustrate what ‘giving place’ can be taken to mean as a description of the act of hospitality in its various forms, among which are instances wherein giving place can be conceived as giving permission, giving a meal, giving time, giving attention, and giving energy in effortful caretaking activities. These varied forms share a common meaning despite their varied structure, and Derrida’s phrase to denote this common meaning (giving place) shares kinship with the phrasing which lies at the root of Levinas’s philosophy. As I have stated above, Levinas’s work is situated in a phenomenological tradition in which the primary concern is the subjectivity of the self, and its relation to the world. I exist, and so does the world, and consciousness of my existence and my relation to the world of existents is the core question of subjectivity. I have called this tradition solipsistic because it begins from the assumption that my existence and subjectivity are given, and questions of my relation to objects which exist around me, including other people, are secondary to the issue of my subjectivity.

Levinas introduced a radical shift—that is, a shift at the root of this inquiry into existence—by arguing that the experience of subjectivity begins from the epiphany of the face of the other. My experience of being an existing, conscious self arises from the appearance, or the turning up, of someone who is definitely not myself, and this experience of the other is what inaugurates the finitude of my being in virtue of which I am a self within a world. Levinas says, “The ego is the very crisis of the being of a being... I begin to ask myself if my being is justified, if the *Da* of my *Dasein* is not already the usurpation of somebody else's place” (1989, 85). With intersubjectivity at the root of subjectivity, ethics finds its footing at the very opening moment of philosophical (phenomenological) inquiry. Levinas makes this argument in his essay, “Ethics as First Philosophy.” He writes, “This is the question of the meaning of being: not the ontology of the understanding of that extraordinary verb, but the ethics of its justice. The question par excellence or the question of philosophy. Not ‘Why being rather than nothing?’, but how being justifies itself” (1989, 86). The shift is confusing in its simplicity: instead of seeking the meaning of existence by poking at the factuality of my being-here—my *Dasein* in Heideggerian terms (see Heidegger 1962)—the meaning of existence is sought by asking what justifies the existence of this or that being. Thus the “Given that I am here; what/who are you to me?” turns into “What right have I to be here?”

The question of the justification of being has either not occurred to or has seemed superfluous to Levinas’s predecessors in the phenomenological tradition, whose views

Levinas characterizes as placing priority on the “ontological privilege” of the self, or the ‘I’ (1989, 85). In arguing that the justification question is what underlies the relevance of the ethics of hospitality to the concrete act of listening to someone, the central importance of the justification question will become apparent. What follows is a general exposition of Levinas’s account; once the relevant ideas are on the table I will return to the matter of hospitality and listening.

II To Justify or to Assure

Having framed the central question of Levinasian philosophy, I can return to the matter of where Derrida’s notion of hospitality as *giving place* fits in to Levinas’s ethical phenomenology. Levinas writes:

One has to respond to one’s right to be, not by referring to some abstract and anonymous law, or judicial entity, but because of one’s fear for the Other. My being-in-the-world or my ‘place in the sun’, my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing? ...A fear for all the violence and murder my existing might generate, in spite of its conscious and intentional innocence. ...It is the fear of occupying someone else's place with the *Da* of my *Dasein*... (1989, 82)

Fear for the other: is it not philosophically luxurious to be anxious about the existential well-being of others, when it has long been the custom to account for my own subjectivity as a necessary precondition of building accounts of intersubjectivity? Does not fear for the other presuppose that intersubjective relations have been established, and that the social sphere is established, and that existential worries of the subject must have already been long settled? Levinas is asserting that all experience of subjectivity presupposes a relation to others; the encounter with the other which founds intersubjectivity is part of the deep structure of my being a self—an ego—in the first place. Intersubjective relations are always already there; they are, as it were, a primordial element of subjective being.²¹

In moving fear for the other’s existence to the very first moment of subjectivity, Levinas is flipping the poles of philosophy, rejecting the assumption that my existence is a given, and that my innocent right to exist is a given. Instead, the very experience of subjectivity, of being-*there*, has a built-in sense of place, and my sense of being here and not there is not separable from the sense of the possibility of being somewhere else, and the sense of other beings that could be here instead of me. *Dasein* brings with it, in its very

²¹ This idea derives from Martin Buber’s conception of the I-Thou relation. Levinas writes, citing Buber, that “The relation is the very essence of the I: whenever the I truly affirms itself, its affirmation is inconceivable without the presence of the Thou (23, 40, *passim*)” (Levinas 1989, 64).

structure of being-there, the possibilities of place and displacement, and the fear that if I am here, someone else is not, and it is unclear from the mere fact of my existence whether my existence, my being-here, has not arisen at the cost of someone else's being here. In spite of my 'intentional innocence,' that is, in spite of not having intentionally displaced anyone in order to be here, how do I know that my being here is not causing harm to someone else, usurping her place, exiling her, taking her resources?

The core question of the meaning of being is a question of how being justifies its being-here. This justification question requires elaboration. The question is clearly not about whether I personally, en route to becoming an existent conscious being, killed some people in order to find myself here; this would be absurd, and Levinas has specified that the fear for the other is a posture which worries if, in spite of one's conscious and intentional innocence, one's being might not have adverse consequences for others. As such, the question of justification is not asking for me to give a legitimating account of my *Dasein*'s personal history. Rather, Levinas writes:

This question has no need of a theoretical reply... Rather it appeals to responsibility... This responsibility does not deny knowledge the ability to comprehend and grasp; instead, it is the excellence of ethical proximity in its sociality, in its love without concupiscence. The human is the return... to its capacity to fear injustice more than death, to prefer to suffer than to commit injustice, and to prefer that which *justifies* being over that which *assures* it (1989, 85 emphasis mine).

The question of justifying the *Da* of my *Dasein* is not a question which needs an answer. An offering of information about my intentional innocence is not needed. This is instead a question appealing to responsibility. The difference can be seen, for instance, in the question a fallen person asks to a passerby, "Would you please help me up?" There is nothing the passerby can *say* that would be an adequate response; the person does not seek information or explanations. The question instead appeals to responsibility (literally, to one's *ability to respond*); the correct response to the question is to help the person up. A question which appeals to responsibility is pointing to the person's ability to do something, and requesting that the person discharge their ability in a certain way. The question of justifying the *Da* of my *Dasein* points not to some arcane suspicion that as an infant I displaced people in order to clear for my being a place in the sun; rather, the question points to my ability to do harm to others and to displace them in the interest of my being here, and asks me to respond by discharging that ability by not doing so. By consequence, there is no amount of justifying myself by the innocence of my past which guarantees that I will be ethically justified in the future. My self-justification is dependent on my responsibility; how I respond to the other in the future is the only thing that will be able to justify me then.

The question of justifying my being is an appeal to my responsibility to not displace or harm others in the interest of my being.²² This responsibility is, for Levinas, the very foundation of ethics. What makes us human is the capacity to recognize that harming others in order to assure my being is injustice, and that justice is more important than self-preservation. Since we have the ability to choose to respond to someone's presence in our world by issuing harm, it is we who are responsible (response-able) for the response we choose. The ethical response is one which prefers to suffer rather than to commit injustice to assure one's being. That which justifies being is the taking up of and embracing one's own responsibility for not causing injustice. This view is anathema to the subject-focused views of philosophy of the subject of Cartesian²³ heritage, according to which step one is to investigate existence and nonexistence, and only after the matters of one's *Dasein* are settled do we ask questions about relations with others. The possibility of ethics is contingent on the assurance of my being. On the Levinasian reversal, however, the matter of my *Dasein* is entirely contingent on the justification of my being through taking up my responsibility not to harm or usurp the place of others.

In the citation above, Levinas frames the human experience as the choice between two options: "to prefer that which *justifies* being [or] that which *assures* it" (1989, 85). The choice one makes between these two priorities defines what I call the fundamental stance one takes towards the world: a *justification* stance, or an *assurance* stance. The two stances differ in their basic orientation toward other beings. The justification stance prefers to suffer than to commit injustice; this is the ethical stance. The (self-)assurance stance is concerned with assuring its own being as a matter preliminary to concerns of justice; this is the unethical stance, the irresponsible stance, the selfish stance. These two opposing stances, like opposing ends of a spectrum, represent the polarity which underlies the structure of hospitality, despite that in ordinary life we may seldom find ourselves adopting purely one stance or the other.

²² As Sean Hand notes in the introduction to *The Levinas Reader*, "'We are all responsible for everyone else – but I am more responsible than all the others.'" This remark, spoken by Alyosha Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov*, is one Levinas is fond of quoting" (Levinas 1989, 1).

²³ Levinas is pushing back against a phenomenological tradition beginning from Husserl's response to Descartes' philosophy of the subject, the lineage of which hails back to Aristotelian metaphysics (Husserl 1999; Descartes 2013; Aristotle 1998).

This framing of the two basic stances towards the other acknowledges that we are free to act primarily with concern to self-assurance if we so choose, but that the choice to *take* responsibility is the root of morality. Levinas writes:

Conscience welcomes the Other. It is the revelation of a resistance to my powers that does not counter them as a greater force, but calls in question the naive right of my powers, my glorious spontaneity as a living being. Morality begins when freedom, instead of being justified by itself, feels itself to be arbitrary and violent (Levinas 1969, 84).

Being aware that simply existing and having freedom to carry on existing with ‘naive spontaneity’ is not self-justified, but is arbitrary and leads to violence, is the awareness that we call conscience. From this labelling, it is clear we should aspire to the former rather than the latter, but the stakes are high: the Levinasian reversal pits morality against the dominant Western cultural and philosophical view, that the self comes first and the other comes afterward. One can extrapolate directly from these existential stances to a variety of situational stances. If my priority is justifying my being through taking ethical responsibility, then my actions will differ from what they would be if my priority were assuring my own being.²⁴ Adopting the justification stance is an orientation to conscience, and as Levinas points out, this orientation to conscience is one which ‘welcomes the Other’. This is the cue which returns us to the broader discussion at hand: the justification stance is that which welcomes the other. The act of welcoming the other is the essence of hospitality.

III Listening and the Justification Stance

In Derrida’s framing, hospitality is giving place to the other who turns up. In Levinas’s framing, the justification stance is an ethical posture which motivates welcoming the other who turns up. What is justified by this welcoming of the other is my being here, my *Dasein*, my place in the world, ensuring that my being-here is not displacing them or usurping the place of the other because I am *giving place* to the other. As I already mentioned, Levinas writes, “Words are said, be it only by the silence kept, whose weight... solicits the Other” (Levinas 1969, 195). When someone solicits me, that is, when someone appeals to my ethical responsibility through words, either spoken or delivered in silence, she turns up, and in hospitality I say yes, I welcome her, I give her place, because to deny her place would connote a failure with respect to my responsibility to justify my being here.

²⁴ Note that this postural difference is not tied to a specific model of ethics. If I take the ethically responsible stance, I could be faced with decisions where I need to discern which course of action is the one that does not harm, and this calculus could be carried out through deontological *or* consequentialist reasoning, for example. Regardless, the calculus will be done if I take the justification stance; on the assurance stance, I will not care enough to bother considering what does not provide assurance for my own being.

Within the paradigm of hospitality, the structural notion of ‘communicative intent’ which has been central to my argument can become more diffuse: while such overtly communicative examples are paradigmatic of the intersubjective relation referred to as ‘listening to someone’, the broader phenomenological orientation of hospitality, with all the attention, concern for, and openness to the other that it entails, can hold listening in its retinue, allowing for further nuancing of the meaning of listening without loss of coherence.

When someone thus appeals to me I can give her place by receiving her communication in the justification stance rather than in the assurance stance. In the assurance stance, my reception of her communication is conditioned on the assurance of my being; if what she says undermines or threatens me, her communication will not be received with the welcome of hospitality. I will hear her, and probably comprehend her words, but I will not listen to the solicitation which appeals to my ethical responsibility: what justifies my being is to prefer to suffer than to commit injustice. If what she has to say brings me suffering and non-reassurance of my being, then in the assurance stance I reject her appeal to my responsibility. I refuse to listen. Contrariwise, in the justification stance, if what she has to say brings me suffering and non-reassurance of my being, then, knowing that my being is justified only if I do not usurp her place and so preferring to suffer than to commit injustice by refusing her appeal, I listen to her, even if it costs me.

If listening is founded in a stance which includes willingness to suffer harm or risk a cost to my own being, then listening includes within its very concept a vulnerability on the part of the listening subject. Listening to someone could be dangerous. Who is this other being, that she should be so important that I ought to risk suffering and cost in order to welcome her with hospitality? Why are her needs more important than mine, simply because she turned up? According to Levinas, being presupposes intersubjectivity. My existence in the world is structured by the primordial relation between my self and the other, which is constructed by the appearance (epiphany, turning up) of the face of the other, who is vulnerable and mortal, appealing to my responsibility not to kill her (Levinas 1989, 83). By facing the other and letting her live in the world with me, the finitude by which she and I are separated as two distinct beings organizes my sense of being a self, of being me and not her. As such, my self-conscious existence is organized by the relation established between me and the vulnerable other when I do not harm her but let her be-there.

The vulnerability of the other is thus part of the structure of my subjectivity. But not only is she vulnerable:

The transcendence of the Other, which is his eminence, his height, his lordship, in its concrete meaning includes his destitution, his exile [dépaysement], and his rights as a stranger. I can recognize the gaze of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan only in giving or refusing... (Levinas 1969, 76–77).

The double standing of the other which Levinas indicates bears an unmistakable familiarity to the double standing of the guest in many cultures which place high value on hospitality. One is required to show hospitality to the needy, and refusing to do so is to dishonor oneself. Yet the guest is held in a place of honor, is given the honorable seat in the house, and the first serving at the table. The guest is accorded *high* status in virtue of being a guest, despite that he is a guest because he was in *need*. His high place as a guest includes his rights, as a stranger, to receive hospitality. A stranger has the right to receive hospitality regardless of whether he is a foreign lord or a needy orphan. A foreign lord is, in a sense, needy, in that he is away from his home, from the place where his resources and status are kept; even if he is someone important, he still needs a place to eat and sleep. A widow and an orphan may also be in a circumstance of need due to the absence of place and resource giving status and means; although they may be in their own land, they are in need of a place to eat and sleep. Because the destitute²⁵ stranger needs a place, I give her a place; because I give to her a place even though I may thereby become displaced, I treat her as being above me.

This duality of lowliness and height which characterizes the guest in a culture of hospitality is evident as well in the primordial intersubjective relation of Levinas's account: because my being must justify itself, acknowledging the destitute vulnerability of the other to having her place usurped by the *Da* of my *Dasein*, I give her place. In giving her place, I ascribe to her height, treating her right to be-here as more important than the assurance of my being-here. The justification stance, by offering welcome to the other, recognizes both her lowliness and her height. We can expect this pattern to appear as well in listening, if listening is an act of hospitality. If someone solicits me with words, and I give her words the welcome of one who takes the justification stance, then I am according her and her message height; preferring to suffer than to commit injustice, I give her place, even if her message threatens me or undermines my view of the world. It is because she would otherwise be vulnerable to injustice that I take responsibility for giving her place, and in giving her place,

²⁵ 'Destitute' etymologically means 'out of place', according to the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (Harper 2017).

I ascribe to her height. Because I could harm her by refusing to listen to what she has to say to me, I make her message more important than my own self-assurance.

By this I frame listening according to the structure of hospitality, which in turn provides a clear formulation of the postural difference between listening, and failure or refusal to listen. The two essential components are the difference between the posture of justification versus assurance, and the lowliness/height duality of the other. If I take the assurance stance, then when someone addresses me, I receive her communication inasmuch as it does not threaten my being. If her message threatens me, then although I hear it and understand it—both of which are necessary for me to have evaluated that her message is threatening—then instead of listening, I dismiss her message, so that my self-assurance is preserved. Threats to my being may include indictments, accusations, and requests for assistance at cost to me. Threats may also arise when someone communicates something that I believe to be wrong; if I were to listen seriously to this person's claims as if they might actually be true, then I would be forced to call into question my epistemic foundations, and this also threatens my secure sense of place in the world.

On the other hand, if I take the justification stance, then when someone addresses me, I receive her message as being from someone who is vulnerable to injustice, and as I take responsibility for justifying my being-here by avoiding committing injustice to others, I know—in principle, even before I have comprehended the message—that I must give her place, not displace her with my being. Therefore, because she is lowly and needy, I accord her height: I take seriously what is in her message. Even if upon understanding her message I find that it threatens my being, indicting me, accusing me, asking me for costly assistance, or threatening my epistemic security, I must still welcome her message with hospitality. I take her meaning seriously, and since I am responsible for justifying my being, my being-here, my being right, then I cannot disagree with or dismiss her charges without justification. I cannot ignore her indictment, for instance, until I have earnestly checked whether I have caused the harm which she attributes to me. I cannot dismiss her request without first assuming that it *is* my responsibility to care for her, my guest, and at least ensure that she is taken care of, if not by me then by someone more appropriate. I cannot disregard her claims which seem to me to be untrue until I have earnestly checked whether they might not, in fact, be epistemically warranted.

By ‘earnestly’ I mean that I cannot simply, under sway of self-interested, motivated reasoning, give cursory checks for the validity of her message, but that I must, in full willingness to face shame, guilt, cost, or correction, give as serious attention to her message as I would if it were desirable to me. This does not necessarily entail that I will ultimately agree, as is easy to see, for instance, in the case of a child relaying his fears. I may know full well that his fears are unfounded and there are no monsters beneath the bed, but I have not listened to him unless I have given earnest consideration to his claims and the support he gives.²⁶ When I do so, even though I am unlikely to find sufficient epistemic justification for believing the monsters to be real, I am likely to learn from the exercise the source and nature of his fears, and be better able to bring him comfort.

IV Being Called into Question

To illustrate the magnitude of the shifting between the assurance stance and the justification stance as a listening subject, consider the following scenario. Someone says to me, “White Americans need to check their privilege.” I may have a variety of instinctive interpretations. I may interpret the statement as being true, and as referring to me as someone from whom people of color actively need something. I may interpret the statement as being true, and referring to other white Americans, either because I am assuming that I am innocent of racial injustice, or because I have already checked my privilege and believe that I am sufficiently woke. I may also interpret the statement as false, if I feel I have reason to believe that racial privilege is a thing of the past, either because I was taught to believe that it is so, or because I am afraid to face the possibility that many of the dear people I know may be guilty of reinforcing systemic racial injustice.

From the moment discourse has been established between me and the person making the statement, I have taken a stance. If I have taken the assurance stance, then all of the variables leading to the collection of ‘I may...’ sentences above will form a filter through which I evaluate whether I need to take seriously what the person has said to me. If I judge that it is incorrect, I do not need to listen. If I judge that it does not apply to me, I do not need to listen. If it is true and applies to me but I am too afraid to face the possibility of its truth, then I will look for a reason not to need to listen: “People of color are whiney and

²⁶ Note that hospitality, with its drawing back and making space for the other, is not a paradigm of weakness but of strength holding back for the sake of the other. In metaphoric terms, it is one who has a house and food who offers them to a guest. In listening, giving space for the sometimes challenging claims of others to be earnestly considered may require a great deal of strength and determination.

stuck in the past!” If the sentence makes it through the filter as non-threatening to my self-assurance, then and only then will I give place to their message: “You’re right! They do! Well, not me, I checked my privilege long ago and I’m alright, but so many white Americans have got to check their privilege!”

But if, from the moment the discourse was established, I have taken the justification stance, then there are no filters. There can be no reason, in the justification stance, which forecloses my responsibility to give place to this person’s message. Instead of those ‘I may...’ sentences serving as filters determining *whether* I am going to listen, those sentences serve as considerations that must be made before I can decide what *response* to have to the person, either within the conversation or in the longer term. Even if I deem that I have already checked my privilege and am not threatened by the statement, it behooves me to consider why this person felt they needed to communicate this message to me. If I have taken the justification stance, then I am postured to take seriously the vulnerability of this person, and to ascribe height to them, assuming the best of them. If I sincerely believe I am fully woke and no longer need to check my privilege, then in giving place to their message I am likely to have a different response than above: “You’re right! We do! Is there something I need to know? Is there something I’m doing that prompted you to remind me to check my privilege?”

It bears noting that the justification posture brings up a lot of questions for me. I must question whether the statement requires me to check my privilege, or to reevaluate my beliefs about racial injustice, or to consider whether I might be harming someone despite having believed myself to be ‘sufficiently woke’. Even the response of the responsibility-embracing listener is a question inviting clarification about a message that seems to call the listener into question. Levinas writes:

The fact that the face maintains a relation with me by discourse does not range him in the same; he remains absolute within the relation. The solipsistic dialectic of consciousness always suspicious of being in captivity in the same breaks off. For the ethical relation which subtends discourse is not a species of consciousness whose ray emanates from the I; it puts the I in question. This putting in question emanates from the other (1969, 195).

Sentence by sentence, the implications of what Levinas is saying about the intersubjective foundation of subjective experience can be drawn out as follows. The fact that I am involved in discourse with someone does not mean that I can assume that the person is on the same footing as I am, that inasmuch as my being is assured and the discourse is underway, that the other can be assumed to be like me, not vulnerable, and free from harm or violence as a

result of my being. The other remains other, and the simple fact of our involvement in discourse does not offer me a guarantee that my ethical responsibility to justify my being by avoiding causing harm to my vulnerable neighbor has been fulfilled. The ‘solipsistic dialectic of consciousness’, that view which first assures *my* being, before worrying for the other’s, breaks off. The classic subject-first mentality is challenged in discourse, by the immediacy of the other and the inherent vulnerability in light of which all humans are susceptible to injustice. Instead, the discourse grounded in the ethical relation—in the justification stance—proceeds not from the self as a priority to the concerns of the other. Rather, the other puts me in question; the very presence of the other sharing the discourse with me is a solicitation which summons me to my responsibility to justify my being. In this way, the other discourse participant calls me into question.

The notion of being ‘called into question’ did not first come up in this chapter. To review: in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates characterized written texts as weak because they were orphaned, with no parent present to answer to interrogation. The ideas in a text might be called into question, which would call into question the author of the text. The author, being absent, cannot ensure that any questions launched against the text are diffused or defeated. Rather, a written text goes out into the world, and if the text—or through it, its author—is called into question, the author cannot see to the assurance of his own rightness in the eyes of the audience. On the contrary, with spoken texts, the author is present and able to respond to any questions from the audience; the very strength of spoken communication—at least, for those communicators whose voices are powerful to begin with—is that when they are called into question, they can see to their own assurance by defeating the questions which come from others.

Derrida deconstructed this dichotomy in “Plato’s Pharmacy”, as we have seen, on the basis of the claim that written texts are vulnerable and in need of active reception by readers, like orphans in need of hospitality. A reader who seeks in earnest to understand a text not only calls it into question, but seeks to derive answers as to the meaning of the text. I argued that, given the active hospitality a reader shows a text, speakers who are vulnerable because their voices are disempowered can also find communicative success if they are hospitably received. A person who is socially vulnerable is likely to be called into question. This is what was demonstrated in the example above of taking the assurance stance in a discourse in which I am reminded of the need for white Americans to check their privilege. The threat I might feel at the statement, which comes from people of color whose voices

have a long history of being silenced and which calls me into question, may lead me to call into question the speaker, questioning the legitimacy of her communication by labeling her as “whiney and stuck in the past”. To avoid being called into question, I call her into question.

The success or the failure of the person to make their communication to me depends, for Socrates, on the power of the speaker, or on the (limited) power of the (absent) author. For Derrida, the success or the failure of the person to make their communication to me depends at least partly on my receptive activity. If I am hospitable, then whether written or spoken, whether the speaker has high or low social power, they may have communicative success. But if I am not hospitable and the communication fails, then responsibility for the failed communication is not attributable solely to the author, as on the Socratic view, but to me as the listener. The listener shares responsibility for failed communications and on this basis can be held guilty for communicative failure caused by her refusal to listen.

If a speaker has a disempowered voice, her communication is susceptible to failure because she may not be able to secure her defense if I call her into question. If, however, I listen hospitably and give her place, then her text will be allowed to call me into question before I can even consider calling her text into question; the likelihood of her succeeding in her communication is high, because I am listening. If she fails, it is I who am to blame. I have not given hospitality to the orphan. I have refused the discomfort of being haunted by the ghostly accusation that is carried in her claims. For these ethical infractions, I am guilty. If a person is so disempowered she can only speak in silences and omissions, and I fail to listen to her, it is too simple and too quick to say that I am guiltless because I did not notice that I was being solicited to listen. If she appears in my horizons, still presenting a face even if she lacks a voice, then I am summoned to responsibility. For failure to listen, I am still at fault.

V Limiting Responsibility to Listen

Is there a limit to this culpability, or to my responsibility to listen to someone? This is a challenging question, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a full response. Derrida’s account of hospitality radically questions whether there is ever a limit to the demands for hospitality. Levinas’s view puts the vulnerability of the other at the very heart of conscious experience irrespective of who a particular other may be. On both views, our moral responsibility for the other is limitless, irresolvable, never satisfied. In the case of the

high-power listener and the speaker with a disempowered voice, these views present a needed corrective to the privilege by which we can so contentedly fail to listen to the cries of people who are suffering injustice, and even blame them for their own suffering. However, what can we say to a deeply disempowered person about her responsibility to listen? Must the victim listen to her abuser and give his words place? That she must prioritize her abuser's vulnerability over her own survival is an argument that should make us morally queasy. Surely there should be room to distinguish between hospitality and house arrest.²⁷

Derrida mentions the possibility for a host to become a hostage of the guest (Derrida 2000, 54) or for the guest to become a parasite:

How can we distinguish between a guest and a parasite? ...Not all new arrivals are received as guests if they don't have the benefit of the right to hospitality or the right of asylum, etc. Without this right, a new arrival can only be introduced "in my home," in the host's "at home," as a parasite, a guest who is wrong, illegitimate, clandestine, liable to expulsion or arrest (2000, 59–60).

A person who does not have the right to hospitality is not a guest, but is a parasite, and a person who is made host to such a parasite can have recourse to defensive actions, like expulsion and arrest. This idea falls within Derrida's discussion as a cultural occurrence, which is always limited, not within his more challenging exploration of absolute hospitality to anyone who turns up, no questions asked. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to note that a host does have a different response to a guest than to a parasite.

An argument could be made that, in the case of an abuse victim, the moral criminality of the abuser entails forfeiture of his right to hospitality, and as such, he is not attributed the dual status of lowliness and height. In preying upon the vulnerability of the victim he makes himself invulnerable, and he is perhaps in some metaphoric sense usurping the *Da* of the victim's *Dasein*, in virtue of which his being is not justified, and the victim has a right to take an assurance stance toward him. Such an argument merits further reflection, but it is not unreasonable to pose the possibility that, in taking a justification stance, a listener who is a victim of abuse could *justify* a categorical refusal to listen to an abuser any longer, and therefore would be able to justify her being, without letting herself be called into question by that particular individual. If an ethical responsibility to listen to the other is based in justification of one's being, the way out for the victim would lie in being able to justify her refusal to listen to a specific person. An examination of the conditions of this possibility

²⁷ Also note that I am not arguing for the legitimization of those who might hold us hostage with unreasonable demands; if someone claims falsely that I have not listened to her when in fact I have, my account does not stipulate that she is necessarily right. I argue that we have a vast responsibility to listen to those who are vulnerable, not to those who are domineering.

would be worth exploring in future research, but it is not my aim at present to argue for either an absolute mandate of hospitality, or for including a limitation to the scope of such a mandate. It is sufficient for my purposes that I account for the underlying priorities which ground the ethical nature of the act of listening to or refusing to listen to someone.

CONCLUSION

There are at least two ways to go about answering the question of what something ‘means’: one is to answer what the term in question denotes; another is to answer what the term connotes, and what the value or the significance is of the term in question. What is the meaning that ‘listening to someone’ holds for us? I have raised the question and offered an account in response, which seeks to answer not only what it means to ‘listen to someone’ as distinct from other modes of receptivity and responsiveness to other people’s communications, but also what is the meaning that being listened to holds for us. When someone refuses to listen to us, even if they hear and understand us, and maybe even if we get what we were hoping to out of the communicative endeavor, the person’s refusal arouses an indignance, a kind of moral outrage. To be able to say what it means to listen to someone, one must also be able to account for the ethical relation implicit in listening to someone which so upsets us when listening is withheld.

In the above I argued that to listen to someone is to receive their communications with a responsiveness which is oriented toward the successful accomplishment of that person’s communicative intent. I argued that this responsiveness is constituted as an active investment on the part of the listener in making the choice to grasp the intent of the communicator even at risk of personal cost, if what they have to say should call into question our moral or epistemic status. I argued that this choice refers to the two stances we can take with respect to the phenomenological relation of intersubjectivity grounding all our interactions with others: I can take the stance of accepting my responsibility to justify my being by my concern that my being should not displace the other, or I can take the stance of preferring to see to the assurance of my own being in the world prior to taking any concern for the other. Taking the stance of responsibility for the justification of my being is the phenomenological basis of hospitality, and forms the paradigm of that responsiveness we call ‘listening to someone’. Taking the stance of self-assurance makes my own concerns a filter that conditions my responsiveness toward someone else, such that I may refuse to listen

to someone who calls me into question. Because the assurance stance prefers to risk harm or injustice to others rather than allow myself to be called into question, the one to whom I refuse to listen is likely to feel moral outrage and may even feel herself to be in danger, because my refusal of hospitality amounts to a refusal of my ethical responsibilities toward the other.

A key strength of my argument is that the same account of listening has equal explanatory value for each character in each of the scenarios I have offered. We must be unsatisfied with an account which would argue that listening is a plain and simple matter of language processing, with no great relational meaning and no ethical structure, but that when people are complaining of injury by someone's refusal to listen, that they are referring to some other meaning of 'listening' which is suddenly interpersonal and ethical. Any account of listening which makes listening a merely passive reception of speech would require us to define listening as two separate things: one which is simple, and one which is interpersonal and ethical. We would need to say that the notion of listening to an instructor giving a lecture means two totally different things when it occurs without issue and when it is withheld (p.17), and it is difficult to explain why the definition changes between scenarios. Instead of facing this problem, my account has defined listening as an intersubjective relation that is established when someone takes the ethical posture of hospitality toward the other. This account applies equally to the students in both lecture scenarios, explaining that the students who take the self-assurance posture refuse hospitality to the second lecturer but grant it to the first, because they do not perceive her as a threat. Thus instead of arguing that listening has a different structure in the second scenario, I have argued that the structure of listening is the same in both cases, with the implicit features of the first scenario becoming explicit in the second when the stakes have been raised.

I have argued for an account of listening which places a responsibility on the listener that is independent of the responsibilities, skills, or capacities of the communicator. My responsibility to listen to the other is not excused if her communicative capacity is hindered. No less than with my peers and superiors, I am responsible to listen to the Echo-characters (p. 15), the 'irrationally' frightened children, the refugee who does not know my language, and the infant who does not know any language. That it is more difficult to fulfill my responsibility to those who speak by gesture or cry does not mean they are less vulnerable to harm or that my obliviousness is excused; if anything, the vulnerability of those whose communicative capacity is limited increases the urgency of the ethics of hospitality. This is

a responsibility which does not resolve, which does not lend itself to the feeling that one has fulfilled her responsibility to those around her and can put her feet up. Rather like a ghost, this Levinasian responsibility haunts us, asking us whether what we thought was the wind might not have been a cry—that is, whether in our relations with vulnerable people we have listened to all that they are (and are not) saying when we are inclined to think that we are fully justified and have fulfilled all our duties to them.

To listen to someone is to not filter out and dismiss any claims they make which call us into question. To listen to someone is to first consider earnestly that we might be wrong, or might be in the wrong, before considering whether the appeal of the other can be dismissed. To listen to the frightened child does not entail believing in the monsters under his bed, but it does entail listening seriously to the origins and reasons of his fear before dismissing them (p. 51). To listen to the battered woman's court testimony does not *entail* judging the defendant to be guilty, but it does entail ensuring to the best of one's ability that the woman's testimony is heard on equal footing with any other, not dismissed as irrational because her speech is not 'educated' (p. 39). My account lacks one important component, in that I have not elaborated its relation to analytic accounts of language and communication. I have not said what, in terms of semantics, speech act theory, or an expressivist account of language, is the precise 'activity' for which a listener is responsible. This task is my next step.

I would be well within philosophical precedent to begin my account of listening from an examination of Socratic dialogue, which might give an interesting picture of what it means for a student to listen to a mentor whose communicative ability is unfringed. I would likewise be well within philosophical precedent to begin my account from an analysis of Odysseus, receiving hospitality from the inhabitants of many foreign shores who offer him lodging and listen to his tale. But not all people are philosophical giants or warrior heroes. Rather than offer an account of listening which assumes that our 'guests' will be so illustrious, and then reconfigure the account to answer the meaning of listening to those who are exceptions to the norms, I have offered an account on the basis of Echo, who cannot speak for herself, on the basis of the orphan, on the basis of those who by the cry of the voice or the look of their face appeal to our ethical responsibility to justify our being in the world by the hospitality we show to whoever shares our world.

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