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Listening and Normative Entanglement: A Pragmatic Foundation for Conversational Ethics

Susan E Notess

Abstract

People care very much about being listened to. In everyday talk, we make moral-sounding judgements of people as listeners: praising a doctor who listens well even if she does not have a ready solution, or blaming a boss who does not listen even if the employee manages to get her situation addressed. In this sense, listening is a *normative* behaviour: that is, we *ought* to be good listeners. Whilst several disciplines have addressed the normative importance of interpersonal listening—particularly in sociology, psychology, media and culture studies—analytic philosophy does not have a framework for dealing with listening as a normative interpersonal behaviour. Listening usually gets reduced mere speech-parsing (in philosophy of language), or into a matter of belief and trust in the testimony of credible knowers (in social epistemology). My preliminary task is to analyse why this reductive view is taken for granted in the discipline; to diagnose the problem behind the reduction and propose a more useful alternative approach.

The central task of my work is to give an account of listening which captures its distinctively normative quality as an interpersonal way of relating to someone: one listens not because the speaker is an epistemic expert, but because the speaker is a person, worthy of recognition and care. I created a framework which accomplishes this by deploying the conceptual resources of conversation sociology and psycholinguistics, in counterpoint to the standing philosophical work on the ethics and politics of speech and silencing, to create a practical ethics of listening to people.

Listening and Normative Entanglement: A Pragmatic Foundation for Conversational Ethics

by

Susan E Notess

A thesis submitted to the Department of Philosophy in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at Durham University

2021

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Mentor, friend, and loving listener
Whose counsel was the match that ignited this project.*

*I hope it yields light and warmth to all who read it
And does justice to his memory.*

Chapter 1

The Groundwork

*'Careful the things you say; children will listen
Careful you do it too; children will see and learn'*
—Stephen Sondheim¹

We the people, in our ordinary talk, talk about listening in ways that show we place value on being listened to, such that we ordinarily make moral-sounding judgements about the listening behaviour of others. My opening claim is this: Listening is treated (by *we the people*, in our ordinary talk, not by philosophers) as a *moral concept*. When identifying what it means 'to listen to someone', we need to see how it is conceptually different from other concepts of speech-responsiveness (such as hearing, understanding, comprehending, grasping, believing, agreeing, being convinced, complying, obeying...). What is distinctive about listening? It helps to look at some of the remarkable distinctions people make, such as: 'I don't think I managed to convince her, but at least she listened to me this time.' Distinctions like these can be found for all the other concepts above. Listening behaviour often tracks with one or more of those concepts but is evidently not clearly reducible to any one or any firm combination of them.

What makes listening distinct from other concepts of speech-responsiveness is that, whereas the others are perceptual, linguistic, and epistemic, listening is a particular kind of normatively loaded concept. What I mean by this is that listening is a concept we wheel out specifically for the purpose

¹ Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 16th print (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2010), 136.

of judging the normativity of a person's mode of responsiveness—to praise good listening, to blame people who fail or refuse to listen. We have norms for conversation, norms of language use, norms of knowledge and belief, and moral norms around epistemic responsiveness. The burgeoning literatures on virtue epistemology, building on Miranda Fricker's foundation in *Epistemic Injustice*,² highlight the norms that guide the way we treat people as knowers, and how failures to correctly respond to knowers (such as a prejudice-based credibility deficit) cause such knowers to be harmed in that very capacity.

A recurring theme in this literature is that epistemic injustices look, in many cases, like a failure to listen to someone. In my initial investigations, I was often pointed to *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, a collected volume of essays edited by Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr.³ On the cover of this book is a photograph of an open hand; someone has scrawled the word 'LISTEN' in capital letters across the palm. Yet a search of the entire book reveals fewer than 50 uses of verbs of listening across the 438 page volume. Most of these uses are one-off descriptors standing in as synonyms for cases in which someone was not believed by someone else. Three essays, however, refer repeatedly to listening as its own concept.⁴ A look at the contrasts between these essays is revealing.

A Question for Virtue Epistemology?

In 'Allies behaving badly: gaslighting as epistemic injustice', Rachel McKinnon highlights a recurring problem of allies not listening to those they claim to support.⁵ McKinnon uses the phrase 'not listening' to point to the phenomenon

² Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³ *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁴ Rachel McKinnon, 'Allies Behaving Badly', in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 167–74, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315212043-16>; José Medina, 'Varieties of Hermeneutical Injustice', in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile M. Pohlhaus (New York: Routledge, 2017), 41–52; Anastasia Philippa Scrutton, 'Epistemic Injustice and Mental Illness', in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 347–55, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315212043-34>.

⁵ McKinnon, 'Allies Behaving Badly', 2017, 167–74.

which, on her analysis, builds up to a form of gaslighting. If not listening to someone is equivalent to gaslighting them, then we would certainly have grounds to consider the moral stakes of listening as a concept; however, gaslighting is a term used to pick out a specific kind of oppressive behaviour,⁶ and the mundane familiarity with which we negotiate about listening and being listened to on a day-to-day basis does not seem to pick out something so starkly malicious. No, what McKinnon seems to be doing here is building a case to show how patterns in something mundane—like whether or not we listen to someone—can be used in bigger picture harms. This seems true, and it tells us something about gaslighting, but it does not really tell us anything about how to theorise what listening is or how to do it. The relationship between listening and bigger picture harms, including gaslighting, is dealt with in Chapter 2.

In ‘Epistemic injustice and mental illness’, Anastasia Philippa Scrutton explores psychiatric diagnosis and treatment as a case study for epistemic injustice.⁷ Psychiatrists are medical experts and, in most cases, psychiatric patients are not. Only the patient—the experient—can tell the psychiatrist what their experience has been, but experients of psychiatric disorders are frequently not taken to be credible witnesses. For appropriate diagnosis and treatment to take place, doctors have to find out from the patients what is going on, and this, we tend to say, requires doctors to listen to the patients. However, the doctor is in a position of authority and expertise, and as such is in a position to gainsay patients, it would seem. The epistemic discrepancy creates a tension around the need for patients to feel sure that they have been listened to by their doctors.

This tension highlights a problem for understanding ‘listening’ as a posture of epistemic attention and reaction. What we demand of healthcare professionals is that they listen to patients, but also bring their expertise to bear, even if that means not (necessarily) quite *believing* the patient’s take on what is going on or what must be done. A doctor needs to be able to correct a patient’s idea of what

⁶ Kate Abramson, ‘Turning up the Lights on Gaslighting’, *Philosophical Perspectives* 28, no. 1 (1 December 2014): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpe.12046>.

⁷ Scrutton, ‘Epistemic Injustice and Mental Illness’, 347–55.

sorts of treatment might be appropriate, for example, and the doctor should by no means be held hostage to a patient's non-expert beliefs in the name of listening to the patient's voice. Scrutton's case studies reveal, however, that there is more at stake in these interactions besides a contest of credibility or expertise. One patient who complained of not being listened to mentioned that the doctor had not even *heard* what she had said, but had 'scrutinised' her like an object, and she felt 'mocked'.⁸ Similarly, in a case study on general healthcare and epistemic injustice, Kidd and Carel cite patients' descriptions of not being listened to as 'he just laughed off my genuine and serious concern... I never did get a proper reply to that question.'⁹

The contrast between the doctor's expertise and the patient's lack thereof means that the doctor may not believe at face value everything the patient says—we are used to that somewhat irritating but understandable truth—but what the patients are concerned about is feeling that they are laughed at, mocked, scrutinised as objects, and not given answers to their questions. The complaint about not being listened to seems to pick out a much broader worry about being responded to and cared for in a right way that need not necessarily always boil down to an epistemic worry about being believed. Instead, the concept of 'listening to someone' has more to do with paying attention, taking them seriously, and responding appropriately. A theory of listening needs to capture what it is to pay attention to someone and to take them 'seriously'. This is an ethics issue, but not one that can be addressed using only the tools of epistemology.

The third essay which brings listening into focus is 'Varieties of hermeneutical injustice' by José Medina.¹⁰ Hermeneutical injustice refers to the familiar truth that some experiences are difficult to convey; our languages do not always have the expressive resources necessary to get certain kinds of stories

⁸ Scrutton, 349.

⁹ Havi Carel and Ian James Kidd, 'Epistemic Injustice in Medicine and Healthcare', in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 338, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315212043-33>.

¹⁰ Medina, 'Varieties of Hermeneutical Injustice', 41–52.

across, particularly those that oppressed groups might wish to tell. Where such gaps exist, according to Miranda Fricker, when we lack words or ways for some groups' voices to be justly heard and considered, we have cases of hermeneutical injustice.¹¹ Medina considers a variety of ways that hermeneutical injustice can occur and can be resisted. He writes:

For example, expanding the available vocabulary may meliorate some hermeneutical injustices, but it will not do when what is needed is *more attunement or sensitivity to an expressive style*. Hermeneutical courage and self-trust on the side of those trying to articulate a new experience may be what is needed in some cases, but it will not help with cases in which what creates the problem is *a resistance on the listener's side*, not the expressive limitations of the speaker. Improving ways of listening and giving uptake may meliorate hermeneutical injustices produced by interpersonal dynamics.¹²

Whether due to systemic and structural injustice or a problem at the interpersonal level, a listener who resists or is not attuned to a speaker gets in the way of that speaker's capacity to be heard and taken seriously.

Following Fricker, Medina suggests that one form of resistance to this particular kind of injustice is to become a *virtuous listener*. In Fricker's words, the virtuous listener develops:

...an alertness or sensitivity to the possibility that the difficulty one's interlocutor is having as she tries to render something communicatively intelligible is due not to its being a nonsense or her being a fool, but rather to some sort of gap in collective hermeneutical resources.¹³

If a patient expresses their worries to a doctor, it seems we would expect the virtuous doctor to be alert and sensitive to the possibilities that the patient does not have the communicative resources to convey their experience as meaningfully as one would like; if the doctor is a virtuous listener then she will accordingly

¹¹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 147–75.

¹² Medina, 'Varieties of Hermeneutical Injustice', 48 [emphasis mine].

¹³ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 169.

support the patient to find ways to express her experience rather than laughing off, mocking, or disregarding the patient's take.

The question is: just how does one do this? Medina suggests a brief list of features that characterise virtuous listening, such as:

...knowing when to shut up, knowing when to suspend one's own judgment about intelligibility, calling critical attention to one's own limited expressive habits and interpretative expectations, listening for silences, checking with others who are differently situated, letting others set the tone and the dynamics of a communicative exchange, etc.¹⁴

It is a good list of features, and a great start to understanding what praiseworthy listening might look like. What it shows us, however, is that much of the work of listening sits well outside the domain of epistemology. A listener has practical wisdom—knowing when to stop talking and being attentive to the silences of others. A listener pays attention to her own expressive habits as part of an interacting system. Whether a patient feels listened to by a doctor has much less to do with the precise mental contents believed by the doctor in the presumed privacy of his mind; rather, a patient feels listened to because of how the doctor responds to her. The behaviours and expressive habits of the doctor are what let the patient know that her voice has been heard and taken seriously.

To build a theoretical account of what it means to listen to someone, virtue epistemology provides a good point of departure. The virtue ethical framework provides apt tools for exploring the close relationships between listening as a perceptual stance or 'internal' attitude, and an embodied mode of interacting with people. Virtue ethics is also a useful framework for describing an ethical good that we want there to be enough of, but which can also go too far. Virtue epistemology is good for helping us articulate why there is a problem of injustice that occurs when people's voices are not rightly received or are even smothered, but there are also limitations to this approach. Virtue epistemology in particular is good for reminding us that we should not underestimate the degree to which we should

¹⁴ Medina, 'Varieties of Hermeneutical Injustice', 48.

trust someone—they may have expertise of a kind we are ignoring; they may be more credible than we expect, or they may be grappling their way around a hermeneutic lacuna. But what about when we need to *listen* to someone who simply is not trustworthy, who does not have expertise or credibility?

To listen to the voices of the most vulnerable subjects in our communities, and to hear out those who are so often subjected to prejudiced dismissal, we need to be virtuous in such a way that we nevertheless are attuned to, sensitive to, alert to, and supportive of the things people are trying to say. If we are virtuous listeners, then we will be well set up to respond rightly to those who *are* experts or otherwise trustworthy, but we will also be well set up to respond rightly to the frightened child who tells us tales of monsters under the bed.

A brief aside: It should be noted that two concerns co-exist here. One is that we need to listen to children even when they are not in a position to offer epistemically credible testimony. The other is that we need to not propagate epistemic injustice against children by undermining them as knowers. Burroughs and Tollefsen argue the second point, claiming that, ‘We need to develop a *relational* conception of child testimonial agency that includes the adult and her ability to *actively listen* to the child.’¹⁵ The arguments of Burroughs and Tollefsen resonate with my project, but it is not clear that the concept of active listening as it stands in the literature on education will do the work we need it to do. For example, Burroughs and Tollefsen describe active listening as a skill of being open to the different ways that children prefer to communicate, which ‘contributes to the development of a potential speaker’s *voice* and creates the conditions for a child to speak and be heard.’¹⁶ This advice seems sound, but it does not account for what the underlying concept of listening is picking out, nor explain why it is so significant. I take it to be the case that ‘active listening’, like empathy (see note 32), is a concept often invoked to try to explain listening, but which itself would be

¹⁵ Michael D. Burroughs and Deborah Tollefsen, ‘Learning to Listen: Epistemic Injustice and the Child’, *Episteme* 13, no. 3 (September 2016): 360, <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2015.64>.

¹⁶ Burroughs and Tollefsen, 371, 374.

much easier to understand if we had a robust theory of listening in place. Therefore, it does not serve an explanatory role in my project.

Some Starting Assumptions

If listening to people is a virtue to be cultivated, what sort of virtue is it? We begin here by setting out some of the commonly held assumptions which seem to be at play in guiding our everyday talk about listening. The claims which follow are general trends in how we talk about listening; each of these is given to ensure we have the right explananda in focus. The content of these claims will be interpreted, critiqued, and argued for over the course of the subsequent chapters.

Listening is like *honesty*, in that it is a normatively loaded term. That is to say, when we wheel out the word 'listening', we do so in order to judge someone's interpersonal responsiveness as praiseworthy or blameworthy. Consider a patient who receives information from a doctor about available cancer treatments. The patient tries as best he can to understand the information, and then relays it to his family. As it happens, some of the information he relays is false, due to his limited understanding. The patient does not have any intent to deceive. In such a case, does the patient count as being *dishonest*? Or is this an honest mistake? It depends on whether we decide the error was in some way blameworthy. To say that the patient has been honest just is to say that he has not been guilty of mishandling the truth.

To say that a person is not listening just is to say that something has gone wrong in their handling of their interlocutor's voice and claims. I make this assumption because it squares with how *we the people* talk about listening; it is an assumption that would not be wise to make if listening were about believing someone to be credible or trustworthy. But as listening to people involves a much broader array of responsive postures besides those subject to epistemological norms, there is not a problem with making this assumption. A person can listen and yet not be persuaded. A person can listen and yet not comply with the speaker's wishes. People may disagree at times over what level of persuasion and compliance ought to manifest if a speaker is being rightly listened to, just as we

may disagree about the culpability of the confused cancer patient. But in both cases, honesty and listening are terms used to stamp approval or disapproval on someone's behaviour.

Listening is also like kindness. Suppose I try do a favour for a friend, but it turns out to cause her great inconvenience. I meant well, but the outcome of my actions created problems for her. Would my act be considered a kindness? Again, we might debate which features of the situation qualify it for a positive or negative moral judgement. Key to the debate would be the question of how feasible it is to separate my intentions from the impact of my actions. A villain in a story might tend carefully to her victim in order to keep him alive for a key future plot point. These actions on the surface may resemble kindness, but with such malicious intent, is it right to call them kindness? A bumbling friend may have the kindest of intentions but cause great destruction; is it right for his gestures to be called kindnesses? If we judge that on the whole his efforts were praiseworthy, then yes; if we judge them blameworthy, then no.

The correspondence between motivations, intentions, and outcomes is likewise important for listening—and this is typical of how virtues work in virtue ethical frameworks. A fully virtuous person possesses an excellence of perception to assess what should be done; has the right sort of motivations and intentions in responding to the situation at hand, and has the excellence—the skills and practical wisdom—necessary to ensure that the desired results are brought about.¹⁷ A partially virtuous person may have kind intentions but have imperfect judgement about what would constitute a kindness in a given case, or he may have limited skill in acting in such a way as to produce an outcome which is in fact a kindness. An exemplar of virtue, particularly an exemplar of virtuous listening, has this full trifecta: (1) right perceptions of what listening requires in a given case, (2) the intention to be rightly responsive to the speaker, and (3) the skill required to produce the result that they do in fact listen to the speaker.

¹⁷ Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 137.

It is a feature of virtue ethical theories that they deal well with the complexity of moral goods that seem to require an integration of motivation, perception, and skill in bringing about right outcomes. This integration can be helpful with respect to understanding epistemological goods. In theorising epistemic norms like sincerity and honesty it is sensible, for clarity's sake, to assume that one's internal mental states and external actions function separately. The problem in cases of insincerity or dishonesty stems from an agent having one thing going on in the head, whilst claiming something to the contrary. The disunity, or dis-integration of perceptions, intentions, and action gives rise to instances of epistemically vicious behaviour (e.g., lying, deception). The epistemologist may be content to preserve the theoretical usefulness of keeping mental states and interpersonal actions distinct, but I propose that this kind of disintegration of the internal and external, where it occurs in actuality, is both an achievement (rather than a default way for things to be) and a cause for concern.¹⁸

For example, it seems farfetched to suppose that one can genuinely listen to someone internally and yet manage to entirely conceal this fact, or vice versa. I work instead from a more embodied approach to mental actions, assuming that by default, we reveal through our behaviour what sort of listening is going on 'inside'—an assumption which is supported by sociological, linguistic, and psychological analyses of how conversation works (see Chapters 5 and 6). To genuinely conceal or misdirect someone is an achievement. Not everyone would have the actor's skill of portraying in their behaviour something contrary to their genuine responsiveness; only some can manage that pretence. So yes, I take it that behavioural and internal actions may sometimes diverge, but this is an accomplishment which is only meaningful as a deviation from the ordinary case, and which can be an early form of the disintegration which will be examined in the chapters ahead as both a cause and an effect, at various times, of vicious behaviour. Chapter 2 gives especially close attention to the disintegration which

¹⁸ By 'achievement' I mean that it is not the default way for things to be, but rather is a state of affairs which must be brought about, or accomplished, as the result of some processes. I do not use 'achievement' in the evaluative sense, to label something wonderful that has been admirably brought about.

results from moral damage and from experiencing ongoing psychological oppression.

Listening, in its most iconic form, takes place between two interlocutors involved in a personal, private conversation. The concept of listening is also vital for describing more complex contexts—how a teacher listens to her class (collective agent), how a jury (collective agent) listens to a witness, how institutions listen to their constituents (both collective agents)—but I am working here from the assumption that these other forms of listening are variations on the central theme of conversational listening; therefore, I focus almost exclusively on the dyadic theme here.¹⁹ We do find discussions of listening as a professional technique of the therapist or the educator, wherein the concept of listen is largely functioning as the *explanans* rather than *explanandum*.²⁰ Listening also appears in discussions of deliberation and rational discourse, with a similar limitation.²¹ The value of listening is evident in these discourses, and the exhortation to listen can clearly be seen in the professional and ethical demands of the educator, the therapist, and the rational debater—and rightly so, in my view. But they do not

¹⁹ For a look at collective listening in the context of politics and broadcast, see Kate Lacey, ed., *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2013). There is also ongoing theoretical work on how group deliberation and group inquiry ought to proceed, such as Scott Aikin and Caleb Clanton's work on group-deliberative virtues or Michael Hannon's work on empathy and understanding in democracy. See Scott F. Aikin and J. Caleb Clanton, 'Developing Group-Deliberative Virtues', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 27, no. 4 (November 2010): 409–24, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5930.2010.00494.x>; Michael Hannon, 'Empathetic Understanding and Deliberative Democracy', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 101, no. 3 (November 2020): 591–611, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12624>. As with most of the epistemological literature discussed above, listening occasionally comes up, but it does not receive extensive treatment.

²⁰ Barbara Applebaum, "'Listening Silence" and Its Discursive Effects', *Educational Theory* 66, no. 3 (2016): 389–404, <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12172>; Andrea R. English, 'Humility, Listening and "Teaching in a Strong Sense"', *Logos & Episteme* 7, no. 4 (2016): 529–54, <https://doi.org/10.5840/logos-episteme20167446>; Jennifer Radden and John Z. Sadler, *The Virtuous Psychiatrist: Character Ethics in Psychiatric Practice*, *International Perspectives in Philosophy and Psychiatry* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²¹ Daniel H. Cohen, 'Argumentative Virtues as Conduits for Reason's Causal Efficacy: Why the Practice of Giving Reasons Requires That We Practice Hearing Reasons', *Topoi* 38, no. 4 (December 2019): 711–18, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-015-9364-x>; Katharina Stevens, 'The Virtuous Arguer: One Person, Four Roles', *Topoi* 35, no. 2 (October 2016): 375–83, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-015-9309-4>; Alessandra Tanesini, 'Arrogance, Anger and Debate', *Symposion: Theoretical and Applied Inquiries in Philosophy and Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2018): 213–27, <https://doi.org/10.5840/symposion20185217>; Alessandra Tanesini, 'Arrogance, Polarisation and Arguing to Win', in *Polarisation, Arrogance, and Dogmatism: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Alessandra Tanesini and Michael P Lynch (London: Routledge, 2020), 158–74.

provide an answer to the question of interest to us here, of how to understand what listening is in the first place, how it works, and why it matters so much.

I also take listening to be a fundamental mode of human relating, a way of treating the people we are interacting with, whoever they may be or whatever our respective social roles. Even so, to have normative judgements of listening show up to best advantage, we will often consider scenarios in which one participant *does* have a professional role on the basis of which the person has explicit or increased duties to listen. The earlier chapters in particular reach for scenarios where professional roles mandate listening to a comparatively vulnerable person, as we get clear about what it is that we are talking about when we talk about people not listening to us. The later chapters shift to scenarios with less explicitly role-based listening duties, in order to become clearer about how the ordinary infrastructure of conversational behaviour gives rise to the constitutive norms of listening behaviour, and further, to the moral norms of listening.

What About Philosophy of Language?

The other potential port of departure for a project like this would be philosophy of language. Literature on silencing in particular offers a way to look at problems and complications of communicative agency. One could theorise listening with respect to speech act theory, as a virtue of giving uptake rightly—a virtue explicated by Nancy Potter,²² and not far off from the sort of thing listening seems to be. One could theorise listening with respect to the project of understanding others, in the Wittgensteinian or Gricean senses, and this would also not be far off. Philosophy of language also plays host to much of our theoretical work on silencing; perhaps listening is the opposite of silencing? I take all of these connections to be relevant and productive, and they all make appearances in the thesis, in Chapters 2 and 4.

However, I have not taken philosophy of language as my main port of departure for this project. There are two reasons for this. One is practical: I make

²² Nancy Potter, 'Giving Uptake', *Social Theory and Practice* 26, no. 3 (2000): 479–508.

significant use of sociolinguistics and Conversation Analysis (a subdiscipline of sociology) in my arguments, and these empirical perspectives do not always mesh easily with the theoretically idealising tendencies of philosophies of language. This is not to say that they are in conflict; rather, they use very similar terminology in sometimes very different ways, and work with different baseline assumptions. I found that it was clearer to allocate one chapter (Chapter 2) to exploring the link between listening, uptake, and silencing. Through that chapter I draw useful concepts from philosophy of language into my framework, importing and, where necessary, reorienting them, so that I can use them in investigating how our linguistic and sociological behaviours get picked out by a judgement that someone is a virtuous listener.

The other reason why I have not based my argument in philosophy of language is also the answer to a broader question about the reasons why this project is valuable for analytic philosophy. I was astonished to find that there did not seem to be any substantial philosophical literature exploring listening, given that listening is so important to us as people. Some Continental theorists explore themes around listening, such as linguistic perception which likens listening to reading and dwelling in language (Heidegger, Derrida);²³ embodied responsiveness (Merleau-Ponty);²⁴ hermeneutic interpretation (Gadamer);²⁵ and broad phenomenological considerations of the encounters between a subject and ‘the other’ (Sartre, Levinas).²⁶

These themes are given treatment in Gemma Corradi Fiumara’s book, *The Other Side of Language*. She notes the dearth of philosophical attention to listening

²³ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, trans. David Farrell Krell, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2011); Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press [u.a.], 1988).

²⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Psychology Press, 2002).

²⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

²⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Routledge, 2003); Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Duquesne Studies. Philosophical Series 24 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969); Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

as such as the reason why she builds a Continental philosophy of listening out of the materials of Heidegger and Gadamer's work. She writes:

From one extreme to the other in the vast array of possible social interactions the stress inevitably falls on the irreplaceable value of the expressive capacity rather than on a propensity to listen. The 'attentive willingness' to listen is even perceived as an eminently 'futile' stance that need not even surface in our culture, in spite of the fact that it represents a vital and essential requisite for thought. 'God grant the philosopher insight into what lies in front of everyone's eyes', is one of Wittgenstein's remarks. Perhaps the problem of listening is also in front of our eyes and we simply fail to see it.²⁷

Fiumara suggests that philosophy's historical lack of attention to listening has its roots not only in philosophy's zeal for the visual,²⁸ but also in a commitment to devitalised abstraction.²⁹ The notion of listening, she says, 'is so alien to us that generally we do not even consider it worthy of our philosophical attention'.³⁰ This point is echoed by Jean-Luc Nancy, who asks, 'Isn't the philosopher someone who always hears (and who hears everything), but who cannot listen, or who, more precisely, neutralizes listening within himself, so that he can philosophize?'³¹

These critiques apply in both Continental and Anglo-American Analytic traditions, but we will not dwell here on the claims that the activity of philosophy is in itself allergic to the particularity and vulnerability of listening. Instead, I work from the assumption that philosophical activity may have many different goals, some of which make it difficult to see the significance of listening. Those goals and the theories they lead to have their own merits, but they do not serve the needs of my project. We will see why this is so in the course of the discussion that follows.

²⁷ Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*, Revised (London ; New York: Routledge, 1995), 31.

²⁸ For a phenomenological critique and remediation of philosophy's historical fixation on the visual to the exclusion of the sonic, see Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Stanford University Press, 2005); Peter Szendy, *Listen: A History of Our Ears* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language*, 30.

³⁰ Fiumara, 39.

³¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, ed. David Wills, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 1.

In the analytic tradition, texts that seemed most likely to hold theoretical insights about listening consistently elide the concept over into a matter of believing people (epistemology again, as highlighted at the start of this chapter) or, occasionally, into philosophy of emotion under the banner of ‘empathy’.³² I attended many conferences over the course of this project, and at each I asked nearly everyone I met whether they had run into any philosophical work on listening as such. This exercise confirmed to me that there did not seem to be an existing body of work of the kind I was looking for. Either this is a genuine lacuna, or there is a reason for the gap—perhaps there is nothing distinctive about listening, I worried; perhaps my project is ill-advised. Two discoveries alleviated this worry.

The Search for a Politics of Listening

One discovery was an array of philosophy-adjacent discourses that do talk about the importance of theorisation about listening, including its ethical and political importance—most especially in the contexts of democratic discourse, the public sphere, and education. These discourses sound a refrain about the strange and problematic neglect of the subject matter. Susan Bickford notes Plato’s explicit recognition in the start of *The Republic* that without listening, there can be no persuasion.

Yet neither Plato nor his successors give explicit theoretical attention to the role of listening, and to a large degree, this theoretical neglect of listening extends to contemporary democratic theory. This omission is particularly surprising given democratic theorists’ emphasis on shared speech as a practice of citizenship.³³

Mondal follows the trajectory to its repetition in Mill:

³² Empathy itself is a fraught concept in philosophy; there is such a wide array of definitions that defining listening in terms of empathy would seem to create more confusion, not less. I have therefore left empathy out of the thesis altogether; perhaps a better understanding of listening to people can help us understand how we could best think about empathy.

³³ Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018), 1, <https://www-degruyter-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/view/title/551537>.

Mill sunders the relationality of social communication on which his wider argument would appear to rest. The listener is no longer a part of a communicative transaction... but rather an isolated, abstracted, and disembodied receiver of an equally abstracted, discrete 'message'...³⁴

Kate Lacey notes (2013):

Listening has long been overlooked in studies of the media as well as in conceptualizations of the public sphere. ...The curious neglect of listening in relation to media and the public sphere has a long and complex history, but it is crucially bound up with a cultural hierarchy of the senses that privileges the visual over the auditory... and a logocentric frame in which listening is encoded as passive in opposition to the *acts* of writing, reading, and speech.³⁵

Andrew Dobson says (2014):

Although much prized in daily conversation, good listening has been almost completely ignored in political conversation, and particularly the form we know as democracy.³⁶

Leah Bassel echoes (2017):

...listening has been relatively understudied in social and political life, in contrast to the focus on voice and speaking.³⁷

The sentiment still holds in 2018, as emphasised in a collection of essays engaging with the work of those cited above:

There is a growing recognition that both scholarship and practice on the politics of difference and the ethics of intercommunal solidarities have privileged the concepts of 'voice', representation, and the liberal framework of 'free speech', while the practices and politics of 'listening' remain largely

³⁴ Anshuman A Mondal, 'On Liberty on Listening: John Stuart Mill and the Limits of Liberal Responsiveness', in *Ethical Responsiveness and the Politics of Difference*, ed. Tanja Dreher and Anshuman Mondal (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 44.

³⁵ Lacey, *Listening Publics*, 3.

³⁶ Andrew Dobson, *Listening for Democracy: Recognition, Representation, Reconciliation*, First Edition (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

³⁷ Leah Bassel, *The Politics of Listening: Possibilities and Challenges for Democratic Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), 4, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/durham/detail.action?docID=4833890>.

neglected. The result is an overly individualistic focus on the politics of expression.³⁸

I take these repeating claims to be indicative of a growing sentiment, at least among those who theorise the public life and democratic discourse, that we need far more than a nod to the importance of understanding listening. Those writing about the politics of listening are taking a zoomed out, wide-angle view of how listening works in society, and in many ways, the things they say about listening are right in line with the spirit and aims of my project. However, I am looking for a zoomed in view that looks at what listening is in the first place, and how we should understand it as a concept. My aim is to explore listening in a way that can answer back to the discourses of ethics, epistemology, and philosophy of language.

A Deeper Worry: The Declarative Fallacy

Lorraine Code noted the lack of this kind of epistemologically usable conceptual account in 2006:

Yet listening is surprisingly unthought, undertheorized in epistemological analyses... Although, phenomenologically, it is a familiar part of many ordinary lives and its absence is easily perceptible, it resists conceptual analysis.³⁹

The worry about whether this is a genuine lacuna has been answered, as there is a persistent felt need for a satisfactory theorisation of listening. But a different worry follows from this: If listening itself resists conceptual analysis, and if in fifteen years of felt need we have not seen the development of an account of the kind we seek, perhaps it can not be done.

This worry was alleviated by the second discovery. I identified the reason why listening seems to resist conceptual analysis—or, more to the point, why analytic philosophy has resisted the theoretical weightiness of listening as

³⁸ Tanja Dreher and Anshuman Mondal, eds., *Ethical Responsiveness and the Politics of Difference* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 4.

³⁹ Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 234.

conceptually distinct from our favourite categories of understanding, believing, trusting, and above all, speech. That reason stems from what Nuel Belnap calls the ‘Declarative Fallacy’,⁴⁰ which refers to our discipline’s tendency to privilege declaratives as the most fundamental form of speech act. Even for the various pragmatist philosophies of language, declaratives are taken as archetypal, whilst imperatives and interrogatives are taken to be derivatives of the indicative mood. According to Kukla and Lance, the so-called linguistic turn in philosophy ‘has been thwarted by a pervasive assumption that the structure of *declarative assertions* is the *privileged or sole* dimension of language to which we should attend in order to illuminate key questions in metaphysics and epistemology’.⁴¹ Even Brandom, the giant of inferential pragmatics, claims that ‘Asserting is the fundamental speech act.’⁴²

If this were true, then the norms which govern how we respond to anyone else’s speech acts would be of two kinds: discourse functional norms (conventional, not moral norms), and epistemological (norms of belief and knowledge). If what someone says is true, then I should believe her, and if it is not true, then I should disbelieve her. But as Kukla and Lance argue, the performative structure of linguistic interaction involves a whole host of normative changes. By our speech acts we incur obligations and entitlements. In fact, they argue, all speech acts ‘strive to bring about certain normative changes: for example, assertions strive to impart beliefs and grant inference licenses, orders strive to impute responsibilities for action, and so forth... speech acts can be productively analysed in terms of the normative statuses that enable them and the normative changes they effect through their performative structure.’⁴³

⁴⁰ Nuel Belnap, ‘Declaratives Are Not Enough’, *Philosophical Studies* 59, no. 1 (May 1990): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00368389>.

⁴¹ Quill Kukla and Mark Norris Lance, *‘Yo!’ and ‘Lo!’: The Pragmatic Topography of the Space of Reasons* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 11.

⁴² Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 173.

⁴³ Kukla and Lance, *‘Yo!’ and ‘Lo!’*, 12–13.

Suppose I promise to see to it that *p*. According to the Declarative Fallacy, what this means for you is that you have an opportunity to give uptake or not (recognise my illocution as a promise), then to believe I will see to it that *p* or not, and to follow with whatever speech act you fancy. But also, according to Kukla and Lance's view, I have now incurred an *obligation* to see to it that *p*, and you are now *entitled* to hold me accountable to this obligation. Speech acts are performative, normative events; each one brings about normative changes, generating obligations and entitlements. This view is much easier to square with the perspective of, for example, linguistic anthropologist Nick Enfield, who uses Conversation Analysis to show how our communicative practices are structured by constitutive norms which, in turn, generate entitlements and obligations⁴⁴ (see Chapter 6).

Even utterances which on the surface have the structure of a declarative, such as 'It is cold in here', function in ways which are not captured by norms of knowledge and belief. The statement is not meant to inform someone about the objective temperature; it would be bizarre if the statement were met with, 'I believe you.' The utterance is not apt for credibility evaluation, but it is apt for normative evaluation: is it a request, an accusation, or a complaint, seeking to put the hearer under obligation to pass over a blanket, on pains of being thought rude? Perhaps it is said out a window on a hot summer's day, as an invitation by means of which the hearer incurs an entitlement to enter the speaker's nicely cooled room and find relief from the beating sun—an entitlement which would not otherwise have been present.

If we follow the Declarative Fallacy and take it to be the case that language is mainly about declaratives which assert information, and that responding to utterances is mainly about epistemic evaluation and credibility judgements, then we are bound to miss what is most relevant for our folk normative judgements about good listening. If these are our options, it is unclear how we can help the

⁴⁴ N. J. Enfield and Paul Kockelman, eds., *Distributed Agency*, Foundations of Human Interaction (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

doctor with the paradox of needing to listen to non-expert patients as part of the process of providing healthcare. But if language is mainly about acting within and on the normative structure of social interaction, about negotiating the obligations and entitlements which structure our relations with others, then whole new vocabularies open up for exploring the obligations and entitlements involved in conversational behaviour, from the medical clinic, to the conference dinner, to the court room.

Shifting Frames

At this juncture we stop to ask: if Belnap, Kukla, and Lance are right to call the standard commitment to the declarative form a fallacy, then why is this commitment par for the course in philosophy of language? Why, moreover, do the majority of theorists not seem to be aware of, much less concerned with, answering the charges of the Declarative Fallacy? Am I reaching for a niche view which suits me, but does not have traction in the wider literature? I claimed above that the epistemologist has reasons to prefer to think of internal states and external actions as non-integrated, because it is theoretically useful to do so. The epistemologist uses a *frame* for thinking about mental states and actions that enables her to focus on just those things she aims to theorise. The frame she uses is largely the same as the frame which allows the philosopher of language to maintain an intensified focus on the semantics and metaphysics of declaratives. Here I follow the tradition harking back to Mark Johnson, among others, of identifying frames as the metaphors and narrative templates which we use to structure our concepts and to make sense of our world.⁴⁵ Some frames are explicit and give rise to rich clusters of metaphorical idioms, such as the frame which casts life as a *journey*, or the frame which casts knowing as *seeing*, as in, 'I see what you mean.' Other frames are more implicit in the way we build our concepts, without showing up in metaphorical language. One technique of the theorist is to identify frames at work, and to interrogate the suitability of those frames.

⁴⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Code, *Ecological Thinking*.

The frame tacitly at work in the way the epistemologist and the philosopher of language approach claims, propositions, and declaratives looks something like this: anything someone communicates or says is like a *message*, which has contents. The contents of the message are put in by the mind of the sender (i.e., speaker meaning) and received, decoded, and interpreted by the receiver, who must decide whether to believe the message, or otherwise. On Elise Springer's view, this approach is a 'mixed blessing. For speech act theory tends to distil communicative activity down to granular or ballistic moves.'⁴⁶ Furthermore, she continues:

[A]n illocutionary speech act, conceived as a unit of action, is implicitly figured as a projectile, perlocutionary effects as its impact. A ballistic action can "misfire," as it were, but then it cannot be salvaged or redirected; at best we may try again or undertake damage control.⁴⁷

The message, which might be any kind of utterance but is probably a declarative on some level, encodes a proposition (semantics). The proposition can be evaluated for truthfulness and believability (epistemology), and the sending of the message can be evaluated for what it does in the discourse vis-à-vis its contribution to epistemic projects, its illocutionary force, and any embedded imperative or interrogative content (propositions about what questions are under discussion or about what one has obligations and entitlements to do).

I call this frame the *Message in a Bottle* frame, and it is wonderfully useful when one aims to look at the truth value of claims without the clutter of attending to any features of intention, motivation, or social situatedness besides those made relevant by the discourse. It is useful for thinking about how testimony works as a way to transmit information out of one mind and into another, keeping focus on summation of knowledge and not on social features. Useful as this is, it is not

⁴⁶ Elise Springer, *Communicating Moral Concern: An Ethics of Critical Responsiveness* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2013), 97–98.

⁴⁷ Springer, 101.

unproblematic, as social epistemology serves to remind us. As Lorraine Code describes the classical approach to epistemology, it was based around:

...projects of reducing objects of knowledge to putatively basic units, often in the form of “observational simples” abstracted from their surroundings, and of representing knowledge, then, in discrete, isolated propositions, commonly in the rubric “S-knows-that-*p*.” The formal propositional structure implies uniformity among knowing subjects and among objects of knowledge, once they are extracted from the messiness of situation and circumstance, whose specificities claim no epistemological significance. In present-day variations on such commitments, in order to avoid contamination by interests and affect, properly objective knowledge is disconnected from what people care about and want to know.⁴⁸

Theoretically, we treat the message as if it were contained neatly in a bottle so that it is not encumbered by interference from wider features of the context. On this frame, a listener is viewed as the person uncorking the bottle and reading the message within. The listener’s tasks are to decode and interpret the contents of the message (what it says, or declares) and to decide what to do with them (to believe, or otherwise). It is difficult to see on this view why listening to people would consist in anything more than what is picked out by the epistemologist and the declarative-centric philosopher of language.⁴⁹

The view advanced by Kukla and Lance troubles this framing. With the declarative moved out of prominence and the focus instead on how obligations and entitlements are modified by each utterance in a discourse, two changes in the frame are needed. First, the nature of interpersonal obligations and entitlements is such that only a small *subset* of utterances change the normative context for everybody; most of the time, the normative changes occasioned by an

⁴⁸ Code, *Ecological Thinking*, 11.

⁴⁹ As Lani Watson notes, ‘curiosity’ is etymologically derived from the Latin term *cūra*, for ‘care’ or ‘concern’. The framing we use as philosophers is designed around what we care about, are concerned with, and want to know. It does not necessarily serve the cares and concerns of wider human concerns. Perhaps this means that what philosophers are curious about misses something key about what people care about. See Lani Watson, ‘Curiosity and Inquisitiveness’, in *Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Heather Battaly (New York, London: Routledge, 2020), 155–66.

utterance will attach specifically to the speaker, to the listener, or to both. (For example, if I invite someone into my house, that invitation creates an entitlement for *that* person to enter my home, but this entitlement does not apply to anyone else.) Secondly, if utterances change the existing normative context, then interpretation requires that we have a grasp of the normative context—and this includes understanding facts about who the interlocutors are; the relationship which obtains between them; the social and cultural norms that apply, and the political dynamics present particularly where there is a power imbalance between interlocutors.

To escape the clutches of the Declarative Fallacy, we need a frame which is *built* to be responsive to the full context of utterances and to highlight the way that to speak is to *do something* in and to the normative context. Now, an approach which centres what agents *do* when they do something is usually called ‘pragmatic’. Two pragmatic traditions are in easy reach here. Philosophy of Language includes the subdiscipline of formal Pragmatics, where there is indeed a focus on what utterances do, or accomplish, in the discourse depending on what they say and mean (as in the work of Austin, Grice, and Searle, for example), especially with respect to what we know and what is thought to be true or possibly true. Where pragmatics attends to the structure of conversation and group inquiry an explicit frame is used, known as the conversational *scoreboard*.⁵⁰ The Scoreboard frame is a metaphor for the understanding shared between participants of what is taken to be known (i.e. ‘scored’ as something we know), what questions are under discussion (still represented on the scoreboard as being in flux or unresolved), and what possibilities are represented by those questions (yet to be eliminated from the scoreboard).⁵¹

⁵⁰ This frame originates in Lewis, “Scorekeeping in a Language Game”; inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010). The frame has been further developed in Robert Stalnaker, *Context and Content: Essays on Intentionality in Speech and Thought* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Robert Stalnaker, *Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Craige Roberts, ‘Information Structure in Discourse: Towards an Integrated Formal Theory of Pragmatics’, *Semantics and Pragmatics* 5 (19 December 2012), <https://doi.org/10.3765/sp.5.6>; Joshua Habgood-Coote, ‘Group Inquiry’, *Erkenntnis*, 13 March 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-020-00232-5>.

⁵¹ A fuller discussion is found in Chapter 5.

This frame does a much better job of highlighting the way the conversation unfolds as a shared activity of modifying a shared epistemic context, but it still predisposes us to the Declarative Fallacy. Operations on the scoreboard are still focused on how utterances encode information, and other kinds of locution are figured on this view as involving complexly nested declarative claims about what should be done to the scoreboard, which questions need to be resolved, and so forth. Again, this frame serves a purpose in its own theoretical context, but it is neither helpful nor elegant as a way to cash out the changes in *normative* context. Furthermore, it incorporates a competitive dynamic into the way we approach conversational operations, where the aim is to eliminate from the scoreboard all possibilities that are determined not to be true and to settle questions for the record whenever possible.

This frame produces troubling-sounding results when we try to explain why a doctor needs to listen to a confused, non-expert patient. If what the patient is claiming happens to be something which has been eliminated from the doctor's consideration as an open possibility, then the patient's viewpoint risks being 'eliminated'. Now, I would not be taken to be saying that the pragmatics views have no better ways of dealing with such cases. The point, rather, is that the frame modifications necessary to highlight *why* listening to vulnerable speakers is important, even when truth seems quite a distant possibility, yield obfuscatingly complex results which do not resonate with the intuitive interpersonal demand that we be rightly responsive to what people say, especially vulnerable people. Even so, we revisit formal pragmatics in Chapter 5 to identify where listening comes apart from the usual pragmatic operations.

The other tradition in easy reach here is the American Pragmatist tradition, stemming from William James, C.S. Peirce, John Dewey, and Jane Addams.⁵² This tradition builds from the originating notion that the project of

⁵² William James, *Pragmatism*, 1907; Charles S. Peirce, Nathan Houser, and Christian J. W. Kloesel, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, 2 vols (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); John Dewey, Larry A. Hickman, and Thomas M. Alexander, *The Essential Dewey*, 2 vols (Bloomington: Indiana

knowing the world cannot be separated from the role of agency within the world. Pursuit of true ideas is fundamentally bound up with what we can do with ideas, and what they can do for us. This approach appeals straightaway to the theorist of listening: what we know of someone, what we take them to mean by what they say, and what sorts of epistemic decisions we make about what they say are all heavily dependent on what we *do*: as interlocutors, as listeners, as judges, and as members of a community. If we want to keep the normative implications of utterance in focus, as do Kukla and Lance, then it seems only natural to keep agency and interpersonal action as an inseparable component of what goes on in conversation. If we want to highlight the moral significance of the actions in conversation, and the moral significance of listening to people, then we certainly need to keep action at the centre of how we understand what goes on with linguistic communication. It seems an obvious banality to say that action needs to be in focus, but saying so is necessary because the Message in a Bottle frame and the Scoreboard frame are both designed to background action, keeping a close focus instead on the *messages* and their effects.

I endorse the American Pragmatist impulse, and my aim is to give an account of listening which makes sense of what people are *doing* to each other when they listen to each other, so that we can understand how to locate the moral normativity of conversational behaviour within the broader normative structure of discourse (those obligations and entitlements again). More specifically, I deploy John Dewey's approach to explaining human conduct through the lens of habit, and in turn explaining habit as a relation between agents, each other, and their environment. Here, in Dewey's work, we find the language which suggests a frame which would be more appropriate for theorising conversational behaviour, and which is picked up by Code as a suitable frame for understanding epistemic behaviour. An *ecosystem* includes the sum of relations between agents, each other,

University Press, 1998); Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House: With Autobiographical Notes*. (Dover Publications, 2012).

and their environment. A key contribution of this thesis is the articulation and elaboration of the ecosystem frame for understanding conversational behaviour.

On the basis of this frame, I put forward what I call the Discourse Ecology Model. In concert with the ecological attention to habit and social context given by Dewey and Card, I offer an explicit framing with which to critically reflect on conversational behaviours. This choice of frame not only enables, it *predisposes* us to a broad, pluralistic focus on the interactions between individual speakers, communities of speakers, social contexts, linguistic resources, and extenuating political and normative factors. To move from an abstract frame to a firm model, I trace some basic levels of well-attested patterns and mechanisms of language change and variation. By doing so, I am seeding the model with concrete accounts of how individual speakers' and language communities' habitual and innovative utterances affect each other's behaviours and the discursive environment itself.

The spread and institutionalisation of new words and word use patterns is one of the easiest kinds of shifts to track in the discursive ecology. Much as a radioactive agent put into the blood before a scan enables a radiologist to see how things are moving and spreading through a body's systems, we can watch how lexicalisations move and spread through a discursive ecosystem in order to form useful expectations for how we might see changes in other discursive behaviours play out across the system—changes in who listens to whom, and how social, normative, and political contexts alter and are altered by conversational activity. Were we to try to trace such changes using conventional models of agency, we would be caught in a dichotomy between individual agents and collective agents, without a clear way to examine how the actions of individuals are structured by and alter the social environment itself. Springer notes that the reflective critical agent needs 'an appreciation of the social fabric of action within which she acts—an appreciation that requires taking stock of relationships, background expectations, and the ways in which her critical response would come across.'⁵³

⁵³ Springer, *Communicating Moral Concern*, 9.

The Discourse Ecology Model forms the basis for understanding an agent's relation to that social fabric.

The problem this thesis aims to address is, in part, the predisposition of analytic philosophy to the 'ballistic' view of agency in discourse. Springer highlights this and addresses the changes needed for thinking about critical approaches to moral agency; Code highlights this in relation to epistemological subjects. Here, we examine the same problem in relation to communication and what we owe to each other as listeners. Take Springer's description of the view to be resisted:

Probably no philosopher imagines that the number of moral agents is exactly one, and that he or she is that one. Yet modern models of agency draw a bubble around each moral subject; when I act, the script is a monologue. Other persons may stand in the wings of the stage: they will be sufferers, beneficiaries, or accessories of my deed, and I distinguish their fates from my own. I may invoke them, represent them, or act on their behalf; to anticipate the ultimate effects of my action I must predict how others will act in the wake of my choice. But all such considerations liken other agents to the props and occasions for what I do—not as ongoing participants whose action may be unsettled, questioned, amplified, or challenged in this encounter between us.⁵⁴

To adequately grasp the moral stakes of conversational behaviour, we must achieve a theoretical un-bubbling of the subject, embedding him instead within the social fabric within which and on which he acts, so that he may see his way not only to amplify or challenge the voices of others, but to be questioned and unsettled by them in turn. What follows is an overview of how this is to be accomplished, chapter by chapter.

Chapter Overviews

As I said at the outset, one of the desiderata for my account is that it should make sense of the 'folk' normative intuitions around listening as a way people treat each other via their conversational behaviour, so that is where we begin. **Chapter**

⁵⁴ Springer, 12.

2 looks at what it is that seems to be hurtful, harmful, or problematic about listening gone wrong. The aim here is to centre the attention on why listening seems to be normatively significant, so attention is not given at this stage to fleshing out a technical idea of what listening is.

We ride in on the wave of philosophers of language who talk about silencing and problems around uptake. Using their framework, we establish a working vocabulary for talking specifically about what happens when someone *refuses* to listen to someone else—not fails to listen, not disbelieves, but in some clear way refuses to grant the appropriate form of uptake for the speaker’s utterances. We see how refusals to listen can play out in cases of cumulative moral damage, such as gaslighting, depersonalisation, and fragmentation, in which cumulative moral damage can contribute to the dis-integration of a *speaker’s* communicative intentions and outcomes. Analysis of these sorts of cases allows us to see what kinds of harm might be at stake, so that we can begin sketching a broader idea of what grounds the moral significance of listening to people.⁵⁵

Chapter 3 moves to look at the positive side of the normativity of listening to people. Shifting from a lens of harm-based moral reasoning to virtue ethical

⁵⁵ One question that often comes up when one begins theorising the normativity at stake in ordinary human activity is this: what do we, or what should we say about neurodivergent people, who may not function in similar ways or may not share some the capabilities which play a role in the norms we hold dear? Are our moral theories ableist, if they do not account for what it means, say, for a neurodivergent person to listen, when that person has very different capabilities to those we take as standard? It is a good question, but ultimately, it is not mine to answer here. At stake are for more foundational questions about the relationship between human capacities and the moral norms we treasure. It is not obvious *a priori* which kinds of neurodivergence should lead us to broaden our normative attachments, and which kinds of neurodivergence might involve such different capacities that a different set of broader moral obligations obtain. I suspect possible responses fall into two groups. We could say that, wherever neurodivergence leads to cases of radical asymmetry in the power relations between people, there is correspondingly a radical asymmetry in the obligations and entitlements generated. This would mean that highly vulnerable people are entitled to far more labour, risk, and enchronic support from their interlocutors than usual, and that they have correspondingly reduced obligations to their interlocutors. Alternatively, we could say that moral norms which are specific to discursive context only apply to agents who participate in discursive activities. This dodges the question about what we owe to each other as conversationalists when strongly neurodivergent cases are at issue, but one might still wonder how cases of neurodivergence require us to alter our sense across the board of what people owe to each other. I take it to be the role of those who give attention specifically to philosophy of neurodiversity and to the meta-ethicists to sort out these deeper questions; whatever solutions they come up with can be applied here, with deference to their expertise. My thanks to Sara Uckelman for pressing me on this point.

reasoning, we look at how listening contributes to the flourishing of both speaker and listener, and in a non-technical sense, what the listener seems to be doing that is identified as listening. By ‘non-technical’, I mean that we are looking at how we can narrate the actions involved in listening as interpersonal acts, whilst keeping clear of the trappings of the Message in a Bottle and Scoreboard frames. Instead, to avoid slipping into the Declarative Fallacy by attaching to a speech act theory or semantics model at this stage, I use the persuasion literature from social psychology known as the Elaboration Likelihood Model as a basis for describing the interpersonal actions in view. I also use Miranda Fricker’s virtue ethical account of testimonial (in)justice⁵⁶ as a template for talking about listening as doing justice to what someone is saying. The theme of justice in conversation is prevalent throughout the thesis, but it should be noted that in this chapter, the concept of listening *justly* should not be taken to be doing a huge amount of theoretical work. We could also talk about listening rightly, or listening well, but I have kept Fricker’s justice framing here to prefigure the socio-political significance of conversational behaviour on the Discourse Ecology Model.

As mentioned previously, it is a feature of virtue ethical frameworks that they support a focus on the integration of intention and outcome. Chapter 3 also introduces a vocabulary articulated by Gilbert Ryle in a posthumously published paper about mental actions.⁵⁷ Ryle looks at how complex kinds of action can be composed of myriad smaller, seemingly unrelated actions, or *infra-doings*. For example, there is nothing about what it means to wait for a train that has a necessary structural connection between doing a crossword puzzle, chatting with a stranger, pacing, or sitting half asleep. None of these four activities has any necessary structural relation to each other either, except that they are each deployed in service of an intention not to miss one’s train. In Ryle’s terms: *infra-doings* are coordinated by a *policy* to accomplish a certain *course of action*. Chapter 3 claims that a great many linguistic, para-linguistic, and non-linguistic behaviours

⁵⁶ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.

⁵⁷ Gilbert Ryle, ‘Courses of Action or the Uncatchableness of Mental Acts’, *Philosophy* 75, no. 3 (2000): 331–344, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S003181910000437>.

can serve as infra-doings, coordinated by a policy of responsiveness which, in the case of a virtuous conversationalist, leads to a course of action that can be described as listening rightly.

The second half of the thesis is focused on identifying the infra-doings coordinated by praiseworthy and blameworthy policies of responsiveness. **Chapter 4** adopts the normative posture of Chapters 2 and 3 but abandons the close focus on private conversations between individuals disjointed from social contexts. It seems fitting to introduce the Discourse Ecology Model with a case focused on how speakers and listeners function as part of a wider discursive environment, to ensure the wider social and political contexts are figured into the model from the outset, not worked in as an afterthought. This chapter introduces two fictional characters, Jimmy Green and Gina Blue. As Jimmy learns to listen to Gina, his listening becomes a habit, and we will see how this habit can change and spread through their discursive environment and, in a crude sense, lead to social change.

With the model established and the socio-political contexts worked in at the ground level, we return in **Chapter 5** to look at what conversational behaviours constitute listening. Recalling the Rylean terminology of Chapter 3, the aim here is to give a full account of the infra-doings—the precise conversational actions and behaviours—which are coordinated by a policy of responsiveness, whether the policy is one of listening, of refusal to listen, or simply of listening badly. This is the technical articulation of what it is a listener *does* that we call listening, so I call the account in the chapter a Pragmatics of Listening. The title here admittedly prods, as well as credits, the heritage my argument finds in both formal pragmatics and American pragmatism, even as I move aside from the usual declarative and metaphysical commitments of the former. To see, for instance, *how* Jimmy Green might go about listening to Gina within a given conversation, we need to see what kinds of patterned conversational behaviour work as infra-doings.

Useful analyses of patterned conversational behaviours are imported from a subfield of sociology known as Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis, or EMCA, and from empirical findings in Interactional Linguistics. EMCA involves recording and transcribing conversations in order to analyse how each infra-doing, each ‘turn’ in a conversation, gives rise to its structure and accomplishes the conversation itself. Existing analyses from EMCA have revealed basic patterns and templates (or, constitutive norms) for turn taking which we regularly and with great ease tend to follow, bend, or even purposefully break or ‘breach’ conversational norms in order to accomplish our conversational aims. So EMCA gives us a way to look at structure across turns, or the inter-turn level of structure, to see how interlocutors’ behaviours function as infra-doings of the (shared) course of action (the conversation).⁵⁸

The findings I draw on from Interactional Linguistics look at how a speaker and listener interact with each other during the course of a longer, extended turn in a conversation, such as when one person tells the other a story.⁵⁹ Throughout the turn, both interlocutors contribute various infra-doings to accomplish the extended turn. This literature gives us a way to look at the intra-turn structure of conversation, to see how interlocutors are constantly interacting and jointly acting, even when one is in the role of speaker and the other in the role of listener. Here also, we see examples of how interlocutors’ infra-doings can follow, bend, and even breach the constitutive norms of extended turn conversations.

This same approach to analysis is then applied to patterns we find in formal pragmatics, about what people do with what is said in a conversation. We need not be particularly faithful here to standard emphases in pragmatics; rather, I borrow and modify the way they use the idea of a Common Ground to explore how utterances respond to and act upon the semantic and epistemological context of

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Stokoe, *Talk: The Science of Conversation* (London: Robinson, 2018); N. J. Enfield, *How We Talk: The Inner Workings of Conversation*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

⁵⁹ Victor H. Yngve, ‘On Getting a Word in Edgewise.’, in *Papers from the Sixth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society* (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 1970), 567–78; Janet B. Bavelas, Linda Coates, and Trudy Johnson, ‘Listeners as Co-Narrators’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79, no. 6 (December 2000): 941–52, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.6.941>.

an interaction. We are, of course, going to want to preserve the focus on the entire discursive ecosystem, not just the semantic and epistemological context, so I take a key example case from Stalnaker⁶⁰ and work in a wider array of contextual information, using arguments from analogy to see what infra-doings comprise the things people do with what is said in a conversation. The dis-integration we embrace in discrete theoretical projects is not a disintegration we want to see replicated in ourselves, in our actions, or in our world. So, in using Stalnakerian ideas, my purpose is to reintegrate the semantic and metaphysical concerns of the common ground into the wider discourse ecosystem and see what people do with what is said, not as a matter of negotiating modal logics but as a matter of social interaction, of knowing and understanding each other. We see, once again, how interlocutors' infra-doings can follow or breach the constitutive norms for what we do with what is said.

However, the real value of Chapter 5 lies in the insights we pull from each of these three explorations of infra-doing templates and breaches. The idea behind Ethnomethodology (the 'EM' in EMCA), is that when we pay attention to breaches of constitutive norms and how people respond to such breaches, we get a sense not only of where the normative boundaries lie, but also of what matters to people about the norms. Put differently, we see what kinds of variations from the constitutive norms lead people to get upset and even outraged at the behaviour of another person who keeps breaking the norms, and this gives us clues as to what other kinds of normativity underpin the constitutive normativity of the conversational game.⁶¹ When inter-turn breaches lead to upset, we get a sense of the texture of social and moral normativity at play. Just as Chapter 2 examines where refusals to listen to someone can lead to harm such that we tend to consider

⁶⁰ Stalnaker, *Context*.

⁶¹ Harold Garfinkel, 'A Conception of, and Experiments with, "Trust" as a Condition of Stable Concerted Actions', in *Motivation and Social Interaction—Cognitive Determinants*, ed. O. J. Harvey (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1963), 187–238; John Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology* (Cambridge, New York: Polity Press, 1984).

such refusals morally blameworthy, Chapter 5 examines where breaches of conversational norms lead to judgements of blameworthiness.

As a result, as we move through each of the three structural ‘registers’ given in Chapter 5, we see where breaches of constitutive norms lead to judgements of blameworthiness, and where they do not. From the discrepancies we get a sense of what an appropriate ‘policy of responsiveness’ entails. In each register, breaches seem to be judged as blameworthy when the breacher does not shoulder his rightful share of the labour and risk involved in the shared activity of conversation, and when the breacher does not allow his interlocutor her rightful share of access to modify the conversational Common Ground. The culmination of Chapter 5 is a simplified sketch of those constitutive conversational norms which are morally significant, and a listener’s role in those: a Pragmatics of Listening.

Chapter 6 pulls together each piece of the thesis. Working with the picture sketched at the end of Chapter 5, we now focus exclusively on the changes enacted to the normative context—the obligations and entitlements which arise—through conversational behaviours of listeners. It is vital here to keep in focus the way that infra-doings of two distinct agents are not just coordinated by the respective agent’s policy of responsiveness but are also interconnected as elements of a joint activity. Linguistic anthropologist and EMCA practitioner Nick Enfield calls this grain of interconnectedness the *enchronic* structure, or relevance framework, of a conversation.⁶² I add a depiction of the Enchronic Frame into the pragmatic sketch from Chapter 5, and using these together, I explain what was going on in various of the cases explored over the preceding chapters. We look at how refusal to listen plays out and how moral damage is enacted through vicious policies of responsiveness like silencing and gaslighting. We see how Jimmy Green made the change in his conversational behaviour in virtue of which he began to listen to Gina

⁶² N. J. Enfield, ‘Sources of Asymmetry in Human Interaction: Enchrony, Status, Knowledge and Agency’, in *The Morality of Knowledge in Conversation*, ed. Tanya Stivers, Lorenza Mondada, and Jakob Steensig (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 285–312; N. J. Enfield, *Relationship Thinking: Agency, Enchrony, and Human Sociality*, Foundations of Human Interaction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Enfield, *How We Talk*.

Blue, and we see how dyadic interactions of this kind can be depicted as part of a wider network of participants in a discursive ecosystem. Finally, we look at how we might depict one of the most non-standard kinds of listening: that of the Samaritans volunteer who listens to a distressed caller. This case study gives us an especially clear picture of how we can understand the value of listening using the model I have presented.

I end with a concluding summary of what it means to listen to someone, how to do it, and why it is morally significant. I do not argue explicitly in the thesis against alternative arguments or dissenting theoretical viewpoints, because there are no sufficiently robust theoretical articulations of listening with which I can engage in such a way. Instead, I offer what follows as a positive account of how we might usefully be able to think about the value and meaning of what it is to listen to someone: a Philosophy of Listening.

Chapter 2

Refusal to Listen: What's the Worst that Could Happen?

Anger can be an instrument of cartography. By determining where, with whom, about what and in what circumstances one can get angry and get uptake, one can map others' concepts of who and what one is.

—Marilyn Frye⁶³

When we speak of listening to someone—not just listening as an auditory perceptual task, but listening *to someone*—we have in view the interpersonal sense of the term ‘listening’, which points to a social behaviour involving a person responding in certain kinds of ways to the communicative acts of another person. There are claims and distinctions we tend to make in ordinary talk which suggest that listening to people has normative value. Most obviously, there is the blame-tinged bid for better responsiveness: ‘You are not listening to me!’ Mild praise is implied when I say, ‘My boss could not grant my request, but at least he listened to me.’ Listening shows up as a residual good that can be claimed when other goods sought do not materialise: ‘I am seeing a new specialist at the hospital today. Clearly no one knows what is wrong with me or what to do about it; I guess all I can hope for is that she listens to me, unlike the last specialist, and doesn’t dismiss me.’

These kinds of claims suggest that there is a ‘folk conception of listening’, as I call it, according to which interpersonal listening is a value-laden term. When

⁶³ Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, The Crossing Press Feminist Series (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1983), 93–94.

we label someone's behaviour in a conversational exchange as 'listening', we are saying that they are in some way rightly responsive to the speaker. When we label someone as 'not listening', we are making a critique which implies they are not being rightly responsive. Certainly, in many cases, listening will overlap or coincide with other forms of responsiveness typically picked out by virtue epistemologists and others, looking at justice as a function of believing or trusting a person as a source of knowledge. However, there are also certainly cases in which the norms of listening come apart from the norms of belief—in brief, anytime one is being addressed by someone who is not a source of knowledge in the relevant sphere; anytime one's interlocutor is forming communicative acts which are not testimonial or otherwise epistemic in nature; or anytime one's interlocutor is speaking from a position of vulnerability, such as a speaker addressing someone with power over their life due to their particular social roles with respect to each other, or due to broader structures of oppression.

This difference from belief norms can be seen especially clearly in the norms according to which parents and caregivers ought to listen to children (that is, to be rightly responsive to them), even when children say things that cannot be regarded as credible knowledge claims, such as, 'There are monsters under my bed.' Although listening frequently co-occurs with, and even helps to structure, various modes of responsiveness, we are most vividly concerned with listening when responsiveness *cannot* be reduced to a form of belief,⁶⁴ trust,⁶⁵ or response to

⁶⁴ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*; Kidd, Medina, and Pohlhaus, *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*; Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa, *The Epistemology of Testimony* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006). Despite its centrality to philosophies of language, information exchange is only part of what we are doing in speaking to one another. Hagi Kenaan notes, 'One can say that, when the propositional sets the grounds for our speech, information becomes the essence of language... a language indifferent to whom one speaks of, to whom one listens. Information is a form of intelligibility that excludes us as individuals. If, in speaking to me, information is all you wish to hear in my language, then I am not relevant to you as the individual I am'—see Hagi Kenaan, *The Present Personal: Philosophy and the Hidden Face of Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 47, <https://doi.org/10.7312/kena13350>. In being concerned with listening, we are concerned with a side of speaking that is too interpersonal to be reduced to collecting believable information.

⁶⁵ Paul Faulkner and Thomas Simpson, eds., *The Philosophy of Trust* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); especially Karen Jones, "But I Was Counting On You!", in *The Philosophy of Trust*, ed. Paul Faulkner and Thomas Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 90–108; Katherine Hawley, *How To*

authority.⁶⁶ Rather, listening stands as something closer to, and yet more ontogenetically specific than, a form of care⁶⁷ or a beholdenness to second-personal address.⁶⁸ Rightly, I take it, Kukla and Lance claim that ‘We speak by calling to others to recognize and take up the force of our words for them. Whatever else speech does... it does it by seeking to forge such a relationship of mutual recognition between speaker and target audience through vocative call.’⁶⁹ The concept of listening picks up the moment the call is acknowledged and determines whether we respond to the call as something requiring *epistemic* responsiveness from us, or some other kind of responsiveness.

The theory of listening given here, therefore, should not be about believing or trusting people, but rather about the morality of listening to people qua people, particularly when those people are vulnerable, are non-experts, or are not in a position to rely on being *trusted* for securing appropriate recognition from the listener. I grant that in many cases listening overlaps with believing and trusting,

Be Trustworthy (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). Cf. Alessandra Tanesini, ‘The Gift of Testimony’, *Episteme*, 4 May 2020, 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2019.52>.

⁶⁶ Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, ‘What Is It to Believe Someone?’, in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. C. F. Delaney (University of Notre Dame Press, 1979); Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). In my view, it seems critically important that we be able to talk about the morality of listening in ways that do not reduce to epistemic considerations, so that we can get clear about what we owe to the more vulnerable speakers who address us. What is less clear to me is whether we should therefore seek to move the goalposts of epistemology to include these matters alongside the already urgent issues of testimonial injustice, or whether we should seek to build up a new body of related literature focusing on what we owe to interlocutors that does not depend on epistemic terminology and criteria. For now, I lean towards the latter, but this is mainly because I do not want to minimise the importance of the specifically epistemic harm done to vulnerable people through testimonial injustice.

⁶⁷ Eva Feder Kittay, *Love’s Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁶⁸ Richard Moran, *The Exchange of Words: Speech, Testimony, and Intersubjectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Jeremy Wanderer, ‘Addressing Testimonial Injustice: Being Ignored and Being Rejected’, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 62, no. 246 (2012): 148–69.

⁶⁹ ‘Yo!’ and ‘Lo!’, 165. Cf. Darwall’s notion of accountability to second-personal address, which implicitly demands recognition of or respect for someone’s authority—a framing which is problematic for cases when we are morally accountable for acknowledging the address of someone who does not hold authority in the relationship, although arguably this tension is softened when he continues to reframe this violation of respect as an offense against the dignity of the person; see Stephen L. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 60.

but there will also be cases where, prior to the epistemic norms getting involved, and after questions of credibility and trust have been settled, one still has reasons—moral reasons—to be rightly responsive to an interlocutor. My aim in this chapter is to explore why right responsiveness to people might be governed by moral, rather than merely conventional, normativity.

In an era of ever-increasing social awareness of the way language has power to hurt and to heal, to liberate and to bind, we feel ever more keenly the need for clearly articulated norms of public discourse, supported by a clearly articulated idea of conversational ethics,⁷⁰ and of the specific harm done to someone in her capacity as a speaker when an interlocutor *refuses to listen*. Note that this is not about when someone makes a genuine effort to listen but fails for some reason. This is about when the ‘listener’ is refusing to listen, in that they are not interested in being ‘rightly responsive’ to the speaker. The refuser actively resists the speaker’s communication going through.

The title question, ‘What’s the worst that could happen?’ can be taken two ways. One implies that ‘the worst that could happen’ is something negligible and should not deter one from a given course of action. The other way asks, say, if we were planning a risky venture, about the benefits and risks involved. If things go wrong, what’s the worst that could happen? *We need to know*, because without an accurate assessment of the risks at stake we could cause quite a lot of damage. To inform our conversational ethics, given that we know language is powerful and political and as such can be a risky venture, we need to know what sort of damage is done when the way people treat each other in conversation goes wrong.

⁷⁰ For virtue-centric takes on listening, see Nancy Potter’s account of the virtue which she calls ‘giving uptake rightly’; in Potter, ‘Giving Uptake’. Cf. Joseph Beatty, ‘Good Listening’, *Educational Theory* 49, no. 3 (1 September 1999): 281–98, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.1999.00281.x>; Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon and Megan J. Laverty, ‘Listening: An Exploration of Philosophical Traditions’, *Educational Theory* 61, no. 2 (1 April 2011): 117–24, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2011.00394.x>; Suzanne Rice, ‘Toward an Aristotelian Conception of Good Listening’, *Educational Theory* 61, no. 2 (1 April 2011): 141–53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2011.00396.x>; Leonard J. Waks, ‘John Dewey on Listening and Friendship in School and Society’, *Educational Theory* 61, no. 2 (1 April 2011): 191–205, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2011.00399.x>.

Background Considerations

It should be noted that not all conversational interactions manifestly demand conscious or effortful listening behaviour. In simple, low-stakes cases, the ‘work’ of listening happens so automatically that its presence is not noticed, much as we tend not to notice the communicative labour that we do as speakers except when conversations become particularly difficult or delicate.⁷¹ To ‘listen’ adequately in such cases just is to straightforwardly grasp and react to the utterance.⁷² Such cases do not help us understand where the morality of listening comes in, so we proceed in this paper from the cases that *do* clearly seem morally relevant. For analogy, consider two people bumping into each other as they pour out of a crowded metro onto a platform. An ordinary elbow bump in such cases is usually part of the mundane collateral of living in a shared world, but when the elbow bump becomes forceful, deliberate, or targeted to a specific person, or when the elbow bumps someone who is in a state of vulnerability for one reason or another, then the ordinary bump becomes an affront, warranting apology, or becomes a harmfully violent action. The greater the force or damage involved, the more likely it is that the incident will register not as an accident but as a deliberate moral harm, or a culpable negligence in addressing accidental harms.⁷³

⁷¹ Rachel A. McKinney, ‘Communication, Labor, and Communicative Labor’ (New York, The City University of New York, 2015), 61.

⁷² As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, even simple cases like this have a complex structure.

⁷³ I am undecided whether the cumulative harms of refusal to listen would constitute a kind of microaggression or an analogue of the same. Either way, I am cautious about appropriating the concept of microaggression for use in considering refusal to listen, which does not necessarily trace socio-political injustices in quite the same way as microaggressions do. See Saba Fatima, ‘On the Edge of Knowing: Microaggression and Epistemic Uncertainty as a Woman of Color’, in *Surviving Sexism in Academia: Feminist Strategies for Leadership*, ed. Kirsti Cole and Holly Hassel (New York ; London: Routledge, 2017), 147–57; Christina Friedlaender, ‘On Microaggressions: Cumulative Harm and Individual Responsibility’, *Hypatia* 33, no. 1 (2018): 5–21, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12390>; Emily McTernan, ‘Microaggressions, Equality, and Social Practices’, *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26, no. 3 (2018): 261–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12150>; Regina Rini, ‘How to Take Offense: Responding to Microaggression’, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 4, no. 3 (2018): 332–51, <https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2018.23>; Mark Tschaep, ‘Addressing Microaggressions and Epistemic Injustice: Flourishing from the Work of Audre Lorde’, *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism* 24, no. 1 (5 August 2016): 87–101, <https://doi.org/10.1558/eph.31404>.

Likewise, the potential for a listener to fail to understand or to listen to a speaker is part of the mundane collateral of human interaction. Ordinarily, such failures simply call for some form of correction or repair, but when they become forceful, deliberate, or targeted to a specific person, or when they land on someone in a particularly vulnerable position, the miscommunication becomes an affront, causing harm and warranting apology. Therefore, I assume that the morality of listening shades off into mundane automaticity and accidents at one end of a spectrum, and at the other end points to the most dramatic ways people can be harmed through targeted, hostile silencing. We can also stipulate for present purposes that, just as one might be justified in violently shoving an attacker on a metro station platform in self-defence, there will be certain cases in which a speech act would be perceived as damaging, and a listener in such cases might be justified in making (non-culpable) use of a refusal to listen as a self-defence strategy against overtly malicious or abusive speech.

With these stipulations in place, we can turn our attention to cases in which deliberately hostile refusal to listen elicits blame. I argue that such refusal to listen causes moral damage, where ‘moral damage’ refers to an individual being damaged in respect to some of those features in virtue of which she is considered a part of the moral community, specifically her autonomy, agency, and capacity to communicate. I argue that the moral damage is constitutive, and I should say something about the way I use this term. I am specifically following a terminology set by Bernard Williams in his book *Moral Luck*, where he describes a *difference in scope* between incidental bad luck and constitutive bad luck. ‘Incidental’ bad luck refers to a particular set of events gone awry, and the ‘constitutive’ bad luck refers to features of how an agent’s character is constructed, or constituted.⁷⁴ This distinction is discussed in further detail in Section 3 of this chapter.

Thus, when I say that moral damage is constitutive, I do not mean that it is constitutive as opposed to causal, per se. I mean that the moral damage is

⁷⁴ Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, Reissue edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

altering the constitution of the moral agent in respect to her agency and autonomy as a speaker. In other words, the damage that is done in refusing to listen to someone is not just a bit of hurt feelings; rather, the damage has effects that alter and stay with a person and can accumulate over time. In the interest of keeping a focus on the way listener behaviour impacts the agency of speakers, a number of inclusions and exclusions apply.

First, we do not need to be concerned here with the mechanics of how listeners get at speakers' meaning—we will assume that, in much the same way one can intuitively tell when she is being listened to and when she is not, listening is something people intuitively know how to do to at least a basic extent, in virtue of being competent discourse participants.⁷⁵ For that reason, I will proceed with a broadly Austinian framework for understanding speech as action⁷⁶ rather than a Gricean framework.⁷⁷ I find Grice's terminology more useful for exploring how listeners actually get at a speaker's meaning, and Austin's terminology more useful for exploring how speakers succeed or fail in accomplishing their aims. In this choice I am following much of the literature on silencing as illocutionary disablement.⁷⁸ This is the focus of Section 1, in which I use Austin's terminology to

⁷⁵ I am conscious that this assumption skates right past some of the most interesting considerations around listening as a skilful, subtle art. We return to these considerations in Chapters 5 and 6.

⁷⁶ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words (William James Lectures)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

⁷⁷ Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993).

⁷⁸ Wesley Buckwalter, 'Epistemic Injustice in Social Cognition', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 15 May 2018, 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2018.1459754>; Kristie Dotson, 'Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing', *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (May 2011): 236–57, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x>; Jennifer Hornsby, 'Disempowered Speech', *Philosophical Topics* 23, no. 2 (1995): 127–47; Jennifer Hornsby and Rae Langton, 'Free Speech and Illocution', *Legal Theory* 4, no. 1 (March 1998): 21–37, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S135232520000902>; Rae Langton, 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 22, no. 4 (1993): 293–330; Andrew Peet, 'Epistemic Injustice in Utterance Interpretation', *Synthese* 194, no. 9 (September 2017): 3421–43, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-015-0942-7>. Cf. Gricean accounts in Ishani Maitra, 'Silence and Responsibility', *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004): 189–208, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2004.00025.x>; Ishani Maitra, 'Silencing Speech', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2 (January 2009): 309–38, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cjp.0.0050>; Ishani Maitra and Mary Kate McGowan, 'On Silencing, Rape, and Responsibility', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88, no. 1 (March 2010): 167–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048400902941331>; Elmar Unnsteinsson, 'Silencing without Convention', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 100, no. 2 (2018): 573–98, <https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12260>.

build out a simplified account of the tasks of a listener in the successful accomplishment of speech acts. We can then identify which of these tasks the refusing listener is refusing to complete, in order to be clear about the point at which the speaker's agency encounters interference.

Second, with regard to the literature on silencing: I take refusal to listen to someone to be another kind of silencing, similar to and yet distinct from the kinds of silencing most prominently discussed. In particular, whereas prominent accounts of silencing focus on cases of systemic silencing due to structural injustice, we are looking at a form of silencing that occurs between individuals in conversation. This kind of silencing can still have impact that is systemic in scope; yet the mechanism of silencing through refusal to listen operates at the level of individual behaviour, for which individual listeners can take responsibility.⁷⁹ This is the focus in Section 2, in which I draw on the silencing literature to establish my claim that refusal to listen to someone is another kind of silencing.

In Section 3, the case is made for how silencing phenomena should be understood as being damaging to speakers. For this, we look at Williams's concepts of moral damage, both incidental and constitutive as mentioned above, and at Bartky's account of psychological oppression.⁸⁰ The aim here is not to say anything novel about moral damage or psychological oppression in themselves; the aim is simply to give an initial, theoretically intelligible characterisation of the damage done by refusing to listen to someone.

With these ideas in play, we can venture an answer to the question of the *worst* that could happen. In Section 4, Abramson's account of gaslighting as existential silencing provides a way to understand limit cases of cumulative moral damage.⁸¹ By analogy, we can suggest what a limit case of damage caused by

⁷⁹ It is an interesting question whether the same mechanism of silencing through refusal to listen could also be enacted by groups of agents. As with most forms of communicative action, I take it that the agents of this phenomenon can be group agents; however, this issue is beyond the scope of this piece.

⁸⁰ Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, Thinking Gender (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁸¹ Abramson, 'Turning up the Lights'.

blameworthy listening behaviour might look like—on the understanding that it is unlikely we would see such limit cases where the moral damage is caused entirely by one kind of harm. The worst that could happen when we refuse to listen to someone therefore needs to be understood within the broader context of how agency is constituted, shaped, and eroded over the course of a life. Nevertheless, this broader context makes it clear what are the harms and stakes of listening behaviour that give the concept its moral weight.

1. Uptake and Illocutionary Disablement

The part of Speech Act Theory which the silencing literature deploys is the criteria for the felicitous (successful) completion of a speech act. The locutionary act (just the string of words uttered) needs to be *perceived*. The illocutionary act (what the person is saying by uttering those words, such as suggesting, demanding, joking, denying, or apologising) needs to be *recognised* by the audience. The perlocutionary act (what is accomplished as a result of the utterance, such as persuasion or securing compliance) depends on how the audience decides to respond.

The criterion of interest to us is the second: audience uptake of illocutionary acts. Austin says, ‘Unless a certain effect is achieved, the illocutionary act will not have been happily, successfully performed... I cannot be said to have warned an audience unless it hears what I say and takes it in a certain sense.’⁸² If one attempts to execute the illocutionary act of warning people, but those being warned take the speaker to be performing an entertaining pantomime, the speaker will have of course succeeded in his locutionary act, having uttered whatever string of words he chose to use for his effort, but he will have failed to execute the act of ‘warning’. The same is not true of perlocutionary acts: I might warn fellow hikers that there is a rattlesnake on the path around the curve; they, taking themselves to have been so warned, secure the uptake by which my illocutionary act of warning is felicitous. They may nevertheless decide for

⁸² Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 115.

themselves whether they will respond to this warning by turning back or by carrying cautiously onward.

This distinction—between the requirement of uptake for illocutionary success, and the unrequired perlocutionary effects which may follow from a speech act—is important for separating the role of uptake from the epistemic values that are frequently at issue in the way we respond to a person’s speech. The perceived credibility of the speaker affects how likely we are to allow ourselves to be persuaded by her words,⁸³ but her credibility does not have any particular bearing on the matter of uptake. For example, suppose I am walking toward the basement of my house. My niece, immersed in imaginative play, says, ‘Look out for the bears in the basement! They are very hungry because their tea is late today.’ Now, I would correctly take myself to have been *warned* about a situation that my niece considers dangerous, which means that her illocutionary act secures uptake and is felicitous. However, this does not mean that the content of her warning is true (since it happens that there are no bears in the basement) nor that the perlocutionary effect she had in mind will be achieved (namely, frightening me out of going down to the basement).

Simple scenarios such as the above remind us that the way an audience listens to or refuses to listen to a speech act is not a function of epistemic evaluation alone, nor of writing a blank cheque to fulfil all the perlocutionary aims of a speaker. What, then, should we take to be the basic tasks of listening? For present purposes, let us say that one listens when she meets the speaker’s speech act with an attentive responsiveness to the utterance, utilising her own attentional resources to perform three basic tasks that are analogues of the three facets of the speech act:

L1 (Locutionary): performing a baseline level of language processing to comprehend the utterance, and filling in gaps that may occur in the linguistic signal due to noise interference or errors in diction

⁸³ see Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.

L2 (Illocutionary): gauging what illocutionary act is being attempted and giving uptake accordingly

L3 (Perlocutionary): drawing inferences as necessary for interpreting the speaker's full meaning, so as to assess what implications and perlocutionary aims are and to select appropriate responses to these aims

These three tasks of the listener support, respectively, (L1) comprehending the locution, (L2) grasping the illocution, and (L3) interpreting and formulating a response to the communication in its perlocutionary fullness. Where the listener undertakes these tasks with attentiveness and responsiveness to the speaker's aims, she avoids throwing infelicities into the path of the speaker, allowing the speaker to successfully achieve the intended speech act.

When something goes wrong with listening behaviour, this could in principle have to do with any aspect of a speech act. We are not interested in issues of perception of language here, so we will assume that the locutionary act goes through unproblematically (L1)—the listener hears and grasps the utterance. Whether the speaker achieves what she hopes to perlocutionarily is not entirely up to her; listeners are not obligated to be persuaded by every utterance thrown at them nor be amused by every joke told to them (L3). Of course, complaints of 'You're not listening to me!' may come up when a listener is particularly resistant to the speaker's perlocutionary aims, but it is not necessarily the case that a listener is out of bounds for this, just as I am not out of bounds in not being frightened by my niece's warning.

However, a competent language user should in most cases be able to get across to audiences her illocutionary aims and an ordinarily cooperative audience should thus provide uptake (L2).⁸⁴ It is only if the illocutionary act is felicitous that

⁸⁴ This claim works for the sense of illocutionary acts typically used in the literature on silencing. One may be concerned that on some interpretations, Austin is taken to identify as 'illocutionary' only those speech acts which are more specifically tied to institutional actions, such as marrying someone, voting, or pardoning. Of course, these kinds of illocutionary acts are restricted as to who can perform them successfully, but we are following the interpretation common throughout silencing literatures, on which Austin identifies all

she has a chance of succeeding in her perlocutionary aims. For these reasons, we are dealing primarily with what happens when a person refuses to provide illocutionary uptake. Refusal to listen can be enacted in a variety of ways, including through perlocutionary frustration (a problem at L3), but for clarity this paper will treat illocutionary disablement as the paradigm case (a problem at L2): a somewhat artificial idealisation, to be sure. Yet, as Potter notes, ‘...giving uptake to another person involves not twisting, distorting, minimizing, or mocking her words, feelings, and perceptions—even when we disagree, or are frightened, or don’t understand.’⁸⁵ In many cases, a refusal to listen implies a broad resistance to acknowledging the speaker as saying what he takes himself to be saying—a resistance⁸⁶ which would typically be read as an affront, and for which the listener would be judged culpable.

Consider the following scenarios exemplifying a refusal to listen. The scenarios depict a range of variation in social factors, such as the distribution of power between the participants. In some cases, the refusal to listen should intuitively seem culpable; in others, the refusal should seem exceptional and justified:

1. **OFFICERS:** A woman answers a knock at the door; two uniformed military officers are there to inform her that her child has been tragically killed by a fluke engine failure at the Air Force Academy. In her grief, she refuses to listen to them.

speech acts as being in some way an illocutionary act. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this divergence.

⁸⁵ Potter, ‘Giving Uptake’, 482.

⁸⁶ Resistance is not quite the same as ignoring, but like ignoring, is ‘a complex attitude’, as Kukla and Lance note: ‘The paradigmatic failure of a hail is when its normative upshot is not taken up and hence not acknowledged. But *refusing* to take up a normative demand requires recognizing that the demand has been made. To refuse a hail is already to recognize and acknowledge it as a hail in refusing it.’ See ‘Yo! and ‘Lo!’, 147. One might ignore someone, refusing to take up the demand to recognise her hail, by, for example, pretending not to have seen or heard the hail. One might refuse to listen to someone by ignoring some salient feature of the content of what she is communicating in order to resist acknowledging her meaning. Ignoring certain illocutionary possibilities is a way to avoid acknowledging the speaker’s communicative aim, when one already tacitly recognises, to a greater or lesser extent, what those aims might be.

2. **FASCIST:** A corrupt leader of a nation with an increasingly dictatorial regime gives a public speech, warning people away from seditious insubordination. In the crowd is a comedian who refuses to listen to the dictator's warning. He laughs aloud at the implied fragility of the regime and makes wisecracks; he makes loud fart noises to get the crowd around him laughing. As the laughter spreads, the speech fails to find uptake as a warning, having been turned into a joke.
3. **HANGRY JOE:** Hangry Joe knows that when his blood sugar is low, he turns into a bit of an irrational monster, saying harsh and unfair things to anyone who happens across his path but which he as a person absolutely does not mean or believe. His friends have seen the internet memes about hangry people, and through humour the group have negotiated a kind of tacit, standing consent from Joe that anything he might say while hangry will not be listened to or treated as Joe himself saying something. Joe is relieved by this tacit agreement.
4. **ELEANOR:** Eleanor is a professor of philosophy at a world-leading university. When she meets new people in social settings, they ask what she does. Although she tells them in plain, audible English what she does, they somehow consistently 'hear' her as saying that she is a philosophy *student*. They ask what she hopes to do with her degree or why she doesn't put her studies to good use. Annoyingly, Eleanor's male colleagues do not tend to have this experience, leading Eleanor to feel that it is because of her gender that people find it so difficult to provide uptake to her straightforward claims about her profession.⁸⁷ When queried, such interlocutors do not say, 'She claims she is a philosophy professor, but I don't *believe* her,' as they would if this were a matter of credibility, instead of a matter of uptake in the first place.
5. **ELIZABETH:** Mr Collins is a sleezy, uninspiring man with a job and an inheritance. He makes what he therefore considers to be a charitable offer of marriage to his cousin Elizabeth. She rejects his offer because she does not wish to marry him, inheritance notwithstanding. He finds himself unable to conceive that she is not agreeable to, let alone flattered by his offer, therefore construing her 'rejection' as a coy little game. She maintains her stance, until her father *does* give uptake to her

⁸⁷ This is a real-life example given to me in personal communication [name has been changed].

illocutionary acts of rejection, making evident their meaning and supporting their force to Mr Collins. The slighted suitor departs, outraged.⁸⁸

In the above scenarios, we can easily enough track the reasons why each person resists giving uptake to the illocution being attempted. In some cases, we find the resistance non-culpable, as in OFFICERS and FASCIST. We might excuse HANGRY JOE, but only so long as neither he nor his friends seem to be abusing the arrangement. In ELEANOR and ELIZABETH, however, we would be inclined to attribute the reasons for resisting the illocution to prejudices about gender in academia and to the fragile ego of an insensitive man, respectively.

In none of these cases does the respondent fail to grasp the locution (L1). In ELIZABETH, we might want to say that there is a problem at L3, but only once the respondent has been compelled to reckon with what the illocution was and maintains a reaction of, 'Surely not!' Due to the power dynamics in FASCIST, we might excuse or even approve whatever 'damage' may be caused to the leader and his regime. I take the first three cases to be 'exceptions which prove the rule' that refusal to give uptake is a blameworthy violation of ordinary discursive norms.

2. What non-reciprocity does to speakers

As I said from the outset, the choice to use Austinian terminology follows precedent from the literature on silencing. A speaker's dependence on the audience's cooperation for the successful completion of a speech act is a structural feature of Speech Act Theory, although it is not explicitly in focus through much of Austin's lectures. Jennifer Hornsby underlines this need for 'reciprocity'—a term which makes particularly good sense within the turn-taking structure of conversations. Reciprocity suggests fair play, turn taking, or doing one's bit.

Hornsby is specific about tying reciprocity to the illocutionary act, as there is something particularly dysfunctional about a conversation participant who

⁸⁸ This example comes from Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Vivien Jones and Tony Tanner, Reprint edition (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), 102 ff.

refuses to take a speaker's words for what they are and for how they are meant to be taken. She writes:

I give the name "reciprocity" to the condition that provides for the particular way in which successful illocutionary acts can be performed. When there is reciprocity among people, they recognize one another's speech as it is meant to be taken: An audience who participates reciprocally does not merely understand the speaker's words but also, in taking the words as they are meant to be taken, satisfies a condition for the speaker's having done the communicative thing she intended.⁸⁹

Again, it is not necessary for the audience to believe the speaker, be persuaded by her, laugh at the joke, grant the request, and so on (although these functions can also be assumed to be governed by a broad principle of fair play). There's something particularly obstinate about a listener who refuses to take the speaker to be saying what she is saying, given that a listener can grant uptake whilst remaining unmoved by the perlocutionary act. To refuse to acknowledge the illocution for what it is would be akin to pretending the speech act had not been made at all (as in OFFICERS), as if the speaker had not spoken (HANGRY JOE), or even treating the speaker as if she had said something she has not said (ELEANOR, ELIZABETH).

Pretence is a useful notion to consider here. One way to understand 'uptake' is as something that is not a conscious choice, but merely an effect of a competent listener having heard someone's speech, all things being equal. In that case, it would not make sense to talk about someone withholding uptake as a matter of refusal.⁹⁰ Alternatively, we could understand 'uptake' as something which, even if it registers in the listener's awareness, only has its function in the discourse when the listener in some way signals her recognition of the illocution.

We do not need to commit exclusively to either interpretation of uptake: *failure* to listen might happen when there is an error in the first kind of uptake, but

⁸⁹ Hornsby, 'Disempowered Speech', 134.

⁹⁰ Potter, 'Giving Uptake', 481; see also Alessandra Tanesini, 'Silencing and Assertion', in *The Oxford Handbook of Assertion*, ed. Sanford Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 748–69.

refusal to listen is an error of the second kind of uptake, implying that what the listener is signalling to the speaker is disingenuous. The listener has consciously or subconsciously recognised the illocution but pretends as if she has not, or gives uptake to the utterance as a different illocution altogether—a closely related form of discursive injustice⁹¹ or hermeneutical resistance.⁹²

Refusal would, in such a case, be seen as a bad-faith lapse of reciprocity, causing illocutionary disablement by forcing the speech act to fail. The speaker's illocutionary intention is reduced to silence (or, in the case of FASCIST, to a laughingstock), and the words rattle around, their meaning emptied or twisted by the hostile listener. This distinction in interpretations of uptake recalls the gradient I suggested at the outset: inconsequential failures to listen requiring simple repairs, but the more deliberate and targeted those instances become, the more they shade over into morally problematic instances of refusal. If uptake is not instantly secured, it is often fine—we have repair manoeuvres for this. But when the repair manoeuvres repeatedly fail, when it becomes increasingly clear that the situation is not one of simple errors in uptake but of a deliberate, bad-faith withholding of reciprocity from *this particular person* or for *this particular speech act*, the result is an increasingly blameworthy affront to the autonomy of the speaker.

Refusing to listen to someone is a bad-faith reaction that works a bit differently to the classic kind of silencing that anchors the literature. Hornsby and Langton focus more specifically on structural, society-wide patterns which result in silencing.⁹³ Of particular interest is the way that a broadly accepted set of beliefs, such as those propagated by the pornography industry, can make it impossible for a speaker to perform certain types of speech acts—notably, for a woman to enact

⁹¹ see Quill Kukla, 'Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice', *Hypatia* 29, no. 2 (2014): 445–48, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2012.01316.x>.

⁹² Medina, 'Varieties of Hermeneutical Injustice', 48.

⁹³ Hornsby, 'Disempowered Speech'; Hornsby and Langton, 'Free Speech and Illocution'; Langton, 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts'; Catherine A. MacKinnon, 'Francis Biddle's Sister', in *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, 9. printing (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1994), 177–79.

refusal as an illocutionary act when she says ‘no’ to sexual advances. Because this type of speech act is not, as it were, included in the man’s catalogue of illocutionary acts she could possibly be making, he reaches for other interpretations, such as that she is being coy.⁹⁴ Thus, he does not give uptake for her refusal, rendering her illocutionarily disabled in that respect.

We have already noted that *failure* to listen can occur when extenuating circumstances contribute to the lack of reciprocity between audience and speaker, such as when conversations get interrupted, obstructed by noise, or fall prey to ordinary misunderstandings. We can add here that socially systemic silencing could interfere in the way Hornsby and Langton claim. The deliberate refusal on the part of an individual, however, implies something more purposeful and specific: the audience, in completing the three tasks of listening, simply *takes* one or more illocutionary (or perlocutionary) options off the table.

For example, suppose Jane has invited her brother, Hangry Joe, to her birthday party. Joe dislikes loud, crowded parties, and he does not get on with Jane’s friends, who like to tease and torment him. He makes his excuses, offering to buy Jane dinner at another time as a quieter alternative form of celebration. Jane, however, relentlessly punctures every excuse he offers, trying to remove the implied obstacles to his attendance. He does not bend, and so she says, ‘Oh come on, you’re just hangry’ and hands him a packet of crisps. Joe is not currently hungry, and so is not hangry. He resents the implication that his disinterest in the party is irrational, a mere by-product of the disagreeableness brought on by low blood sugar.

Now Jane must be at least somewhat aware that the ‘declining to attend her party’ option exists in the library of illocutionary possibilities. Not wanting it to be the case that Joe is purposefully declining her invitation, however, she offers

⁹⁴ There are clear similarities between what Hornsby and Langton have in view and what Mr Collins does in ELIZABETH. Whether they ought to be taken to be the same kind of refusal to listen depends on how one understands culpability of individuals in the context of systemic injustice—an issue which extends beyond the arguments at hand.

uptake for any speech act but the one which he is making (again, much like Mr Collins does in ELIZABETH, albeit with a different power dynamic). She forces his speech acts to fail, unless he changes over to a speech act which suits Jane's interests.⁹⁵ Such a thing could occur in many different modes: a listener may play dumb about an illocutionary possibility, or commit herself to a set of assumptions rendering the undesired speech act senseless or incoherent, or launch a narrative about the presumed motivations or capacities of the speaker.

I need not catalogue all such possibilities here. What is common to these variations is that the listener removes an illocutionary possibility from the scope of her consideration in task L2 of listening. She forces the speaker's actions to fail, making the speaker unfree to perform that act. So, when I argue that to refuse to listen to someone is blameworthy because to do so harms the speaker in her capacity as a speaker, I am referring to the way that an audience's selective refusal to listen to someone causes that person's agency to be unduly curtailed, inhibiting or circumscribing her freedom of communicative action. In this way, she sustains damage to one of the core capacities by which we identify her as a participant of the moral community, for which reason the harms caused by refusal to listen to someone should be understood as a kind of moral damage. To that concept we now turn.

3. Dynamics of Moral Damage

In the first two sections, I argued that refusal to listen to someone has a direct impact on them as a speaker, altering the communicative possibilities that are available to them and forcing certain communicative actions to misfire—that is, to be infelicitous. In what follows, my task is to argue that this direct impact on the speaker constitutes a form of 'moral damage'. I articulate this claim first with reference to accounts of moral damage from Williams, Tessman, and Bartky, in

⁹⁵ I chose the genders of the people in this example so as to reverse the usual dynamic, highlighting the particular thrust of this kind of resistance which is sometimes obscured by familiarity when the genders are reversed: see Kate Manne's discussion of silencing framed by the notions of *smothering* (literally and communicatively) and making someone *eat her words* in classic cases of misogyny; Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–6.

order to get clear about how targeted illocutionary disablement can constitutively alter a person's autonomy.

The idea that silencing is a morally significant issue turns on the premise that, inasmuch as our autonomy includes our sense of agency as speakers, so an assault on our capacity as speech act makers would be experienced as an assault against our autonomy and personhood. As Kukla and Lance frame it, one's standing as a person with normative commitments and entitlements in a community entails that one is recognizable as able to hail and be hailed.⁹⁶ Where one person's treatment of another person undermines that person's autonomy, standing, and moral agency in some way, we are worried that the treatment is causing 'moral damage'. My use of the term follows Tessman's usage in *Burdened Virtues*, in which Tessman examines 'the formation of the oppressed self as a morally damaged being', in the sense that the oppressed person experiences constitutive moral bad luck.⁹⁷ The idea is that through the adverse circumstances of oppression, one's selfhood comes to be constituted, or structured, in a way that compromises one's ability to act with that autonomy held to be so vital for moral agency.

Tessman's claims are grounded in Bernard Williams's concept of moral luck. Williams writes, 'One's history as an agent is a web in which anything that is the product of the will is surrounded and held up and partly formed by things that are not.'⁹⁸ As a case in point, as I argued above, a speech act is the product of the speaker's will, but it is also held up and partly formed by the reciprocity of the audience, without which the speech act fails to be what it was intended to be by the speaker. For Williams, one experiences bad moral luck when one's ability to act is caught in a web in which some of the external circumstances surrounding the act cause harmful or morally suspect results, even though the agent might not have done anything wrongful or negligent.⁹⁹ Two kinds of moral luck are relevant

⁹⁶ 'Yo!' and 'Lo!', 141.

⁹⁷ Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.

⁹⁸ Williams, *Moral Luck*, 29.

⁹⁹ Note here how intentions and outcomes are dis-integrated in this picture of bad moral luck.

here: *incidental* (which arises in discrete events) and *constitutive* (which contributes to one's overall situation as a moral agent).

An example of incidental bad moral luck would be an occasion on which a child runs in front of a moving car and is killed; the driver is likely to feel regret for her actions' outcomes, despite that there was nothing she could possibly have done to avoid them. An example of good constitutive moral luck would be Plato's class of sages, who are lucky to have been born as ideal moral agents.¹⁰⁰ Tessman's claim is that oppression can so systematically affect a person's life that, rather than view the harms they incur as being a series of bad luck *incidents*, we do better to view the incidents as a system of oppression which so alters that person's capacities and the formation of their character over time as to be *constitutive* of the curtailed shape of their moral agency.¹⁰¹ That is, the oppressed person is the victim of bad constitutive moral luck: the grim corollary of the platonic sage.¹⁰² What Tessman adds to Williams' account of bad moral luck is the premise that deliberate or systemic harms can cause similar kinds of damage, bridging the dynamics of bad luck and oppression.

Failure to listen at a critical juncture could be an accident, but persistent refusal to listen to someone circumscribes her autonomy in ways that resemble Bartky's account of psychological oppression. Bartky argues that it is:

...dehumanizing and depersonalizing; it attacks the person in her personhood. I mean by this that the nature of psychological oppression is such that the oppressor and the oppressed alike come to doubt that the oppressed have the capacity to do the sorts of things that only persons can do, to be what persons, in the fullest sense of the term, can be.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Williams, *Moral Luck*, 20.

¹⁰¹ Tessman, *Burdened Virtues*, 13–14.

¹⁰² To clarify, bad moral luck does not amount to culpability, because the emphasis in the concept of moral luck is on features of a situation which are outside the agent's control. The aim of Tessman's account is not to cast blame on the oppressed, but to highlight the necessity of healing in the course of the moral development of the oppressed self.

¹⁰³ Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, 29.

Bartky goes on to give an example of this effect, in which female stereotypes promote an understanding of women as less than autonomous. When such stereotypes are believed, people are led to question whether women picked out by the stereotype can pose the kind of autonomous figure that is typically held to mark out persons from non-persons. This can affect anyone who is confronted by the stereotype, leading not just observers but also the stereotyped women to question their own autonomy.¹⁰⁴ We can apply the same pattern to the case of speech-autonomy: if by refusing to listen to someone I create conditions under which her speech actions are forced to fail due to my withholding of reciprocity, I force her speech into infelicity, thereby undermining her capacity to speak autonomously to me.

This form of sabotage casts doubts in the mind of the refusing listener *and* in the mind of the speaker about her capacity to utter felicitous speech acts, potentially leading both to doubt her capacity to be an autonomous agent in speech, to experience not only her utterances but her subjectivity as infelicitous. In Medina's terms, we can distinguish between *infelicitous utterances* and *infelicitous subjects*, which are incidental and constitutive infelicities, respectively.¹⁰⁵ If a speaker makes utterances which are in some way expressions of herself as a human subject, or are exercises of her autonomous agency, and those utterances are persistently rendered infelicitous, then speaker, listener, and bystander would all have the clear impression that some relevant aspect of the speaker is not welcome in the discursive environment. An element of her subjectivity is made summarily infelicitous, and this is a step to undermining her subjectivity itself, either by pushing her out of the discursive community altogether, or by forcing the infelicitous part of her to be dis-integrated from the rest of her subjectivity.

Some might say it is too strong to claim, as Bartky does, that such harms amount to dehumanisation and depersonalisation. It is alarming to think that one

¹⁰⁴ Bartky, 24.

¹⁰⁵ José Medina, 'How to Undo Things with Words: Infelicitous Practices and Infelicitous Agents', *Essays in Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (January 2007).

individual incident of such harm can really have the oppressive power to alienate someone else from their very humanity and personhood. Such simple acts as stereotyping and refusing to listen to someone, acts which we might at times unwittingly and unintentionally commit, seem minor when viewed as separate incidents, a single drop of water on a mountain's face. Nevertheless, they do contribute to these drastic effects of psychological oppression when viewed systematically. The matter can be clarified by taking dehumanisation and depersonalisation to be cumulative results of extended, ongoing oppressive situations. The longer and more systematically one is oppressed, the more the mountain is eroded, or weathered. The more one's subjectivity becomes dis-integrated through repeated silencing, the more the results accrue in the direction of dehumanisation and depersonalisation.

As with moral luck, so with silencing: an individual may sustain incidental moral damage through incidental silencing when a single speech act encounters refusal of reciprocity. But where someone's speech is met with refusal of reciprocity across whole categories of speech acts or even across all their attempts at making claims in discourse with certain interlocutors—more on this below—the situation is one of constitutive moral damage.

To illuminate the progression of cumulative psychological oppression, Bartky draws attention to this dis-integration, which she describes as:

...fragmentation within their own persons, a kind of inner impoverishment; parts of their being have fallen under the control of another. This fragmentation is the consequence of a form of social organization which has given to some persons the power to prohibit other persons from the full exercise of capacities the exercise of which is thought necessary to a fully human existence.¹⁰⁶

We would not tend to say that refusing to listen to someone is the same thing as prohibiting them from using their human capacity to be a speaker, although perhaps in some cases an especially hostile refusal might amount to the same

¹⁰⁶ Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, 34.

thing. What we can more readily say, however, is that in any action which is interdependent, where actors depend on reciprocity and cooperation for success, there is a possibility that non-cooperating parties can block actors from exercising their human capacities successfully.

When a hostile respondent refuses to cooperate fairly in the speaker's action through reciprocity, the speaker's ordinary human capacity to speak autonomously—to speak for herself—becomes fragmented, with the speech-actor part of her being having been alienated by the person who forces her repeatedly into illocutionary failure despite the validity of her speech acts. As the repeated damage of silencing accumulates, she becomes increasingly fragmented and dis-integrated in her own character as an agent of speech; this is a case of constitutive moral damage.

4. Abramson on Existential Silencing

If moral damage is cumulative, and dis-integration and fragmentation are intermediary stages, then our attention should turn next to what maximal states of this kind of damage from refusals to listen would look like. I argue that they should be understood as a particular form of gaslighting—a phenomenon that entered psychoanalytic and popular discourse under that name following its portrayal in the 1944 film *Gaslight*, in which a man psychologically manipulates and persuades his wife that she is going crazy in order to steal her family heirlooms.¹⁰⁷ The concept has grown to refer to an array of phenomena whereby a person is psychologically undermined by being made to distrust her own perceptions, being told that what she's experienced cannot have happened and that she must be imagining things or making things up.

The usual case where gaslighting is discussed has to do with accusations of sexual harassment, but the same dynamic is also at play in the Disney film *The Lion King*, after Scar (the jealous uncle) murders his brother, King Mufasa, in front of

¹⁰⁷ John Van Druten et al., *Gaslight* (Burbank, Calif.: Warner Home Video, 2004).

Mufasa's young son, Simba.¹⁰⁸ Scar takes advantage of Simba's naivete, grief, and confusion to tell him that he, Simba, was responsible for Mufasa's death, that the lion pride would never forgive him, and that he must run away and never return. Later in the film, when an adult Simba is found and called back to take his place as the Lion King, he does not feel he can be king after having killed his father. Key to the plot's resolution is the need for Simba to work out that he had not, in fact, killed his father, that he had not been responsible. His perspective on the situation had been skewed by the lies Scar told in order to psychologically manipulate the young cub, to prevent Simba from taking his own lived experience seriously and telling the true version of the story, which would reveal Scar's guilt.

This strategy of sabotaging a person's trust in her own sanity was given its first philosophical account by Kate Abramson in "Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting".¹⁰⁹ Classic cases involve two parties, which Abramson calls the Gaslighter (Scar) and the Target (Simba). The Target is typically a person from whom the Gaslighter fears questioning, critique, or disagreement—and this is often the case if the Target is the victim of some wrong(s) perpetrated by the Gaslighter, in virtue of which the Target has reason to make the accusations which the Gaslighter seeks to avoid. Abramson describes the phenomenon thus:

The central desire or aim of the gaslighter, to put it sharply, is to destroy even the possibility of disagreement—to have his sense of the world not merely confirmed, but placed beyond dispute. And the only sure way to accomplish this is for there to be no source of possible disagreement—no independent, separate, deliberative perspective from which disagreement might arise. So he gaslights: he aims to destroy the possibility of disagreement by so radically undermining another person that she has nowhere left to stand from which

¹⁰⁸ Allers, Robert et al., *The Lion King* (London: Mercury, 1995).

¹⁰⁹ Abramson, "Turning up the Lights". Some more recent contributions to the literature on gaslighting also build on Abramson's work; see Rachel McKinnon, 'Allies Behaving Badly : Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice', *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, 31 March 2017, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315212043-16>; Andrew D. Spear, 'Epistemic Dimensions of Gaslighting: Peer-Disagreement, Self-Trust, and Epistemic Injustice', *Inquiry*, 25 April 2019, 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2019.1610051>; Cynthia A. Stark, 'Gaslighting, Misogyny, and Psychological Oppression', *The Monist* 102, no. 2 (1 April 2019): 221–35, <https://doi.org/10.1093/monist/onzo007>.

to disagree, no standpoint from which her words might constitute genuine disagreement.¹¹⁰

In other words, gaslighting refers to the kind of damage that Scar causes to Simba, disabling him from discovering or exposing Scar's regicide by convincing Simba to believe himself to be guilty. This is the same general *kind* of damage that a co-worker experiences when claims of sexual harassment in the workplace are met with dismissals in the form of telling the claimant that she is delusional, crazy, or maliciously motivated. Similarly, by claiming to the Target that she is 'crazy' to say, think, or desire what she says, thinks, or desires (call this the Crazy Claim), the Gaslighter assaults her standpoint as a speaking, thinking, desiring being.¹¹¹

Now the programmes of gaslighting that occur in *Gaslight* and *The Lion King* are deliberate and intense. A specific individual victim is purposefully gaslit by a particular agent or group of agents as part of a course of action to sabotage the Target's capacity act in some particular way. However, gaslighting need not be perpetrated by a single actor with a single aim; it can also be accomplished by the slow drip, cumulative autonomy erosion that occurs when a person sees a certain kind of illocution silenced time and again, by various actors, against various speakers, as Karen Adkins argues in 'Gaslighting by Crowd'.¹¹² If women's accounts of sexual harassment by a prominent member of a department are consistently met with the claim that the claimant is crazy, gaslighting is accomplished—not by anyone in particular, perhaps, and perhaps not on purpose, just as on a crowded metro station platform a person with reduced mobility may be harmed in the jostle, even though he is not bumped by anyone in particular nor particularly on purpose.

¹¹⁰ 'Turning up the Lights', 10.

¹¹¹ Andrew Spear further argues that gaslighting destroys the victim's epistemological standpoint through exploiting and manipulating the reasoning processes of the victim—an apt parallel for the joint harms that occur when someone both refuses to listen to someone and refuses to acknowledge her credibility. See Spear, 'Epistemic Dimensions of Gaslighting'.

¹¹² Karen C. Adkins, 'Gaslighting by Crowd', *Social Philosophy Today* 35 (9 December 2019): 75–87, <https://doi.org/10.5840/socphiltoday201971660>.

Nevertheless, when such incidents are not properly redressed, the perpetrator comes to be culpable. If a woman makes a claim about sexual harassment in the department and the initial reaction is the Crazy Claim, she might challenge the respondent. ‘I know it’s hard to hear, but it really did happen, and I need you to take this seriously!’ Suppose the situation is then rectified, and she is believed and properly supported by her department in seeking safety and justice. We would not, in such case, say that she had been comprehensively gaslit by the bumbling initial responder. Indeed, if she is anticipating the Crazy Claim and is prepared to defend herself against it, she might not be so summarily silenced. It is when the Crazy Claim is made repeatedly, by one person or many, against one claimant or many, that the damage accrues.

Suppose again that the Target calls out the respondent, but that the situation is *not* then rectified. The Crazy Claim is reasserted, and then gossip spreads about the claimant. The Crazy Claim then might be followed up by whatever manipulations are necessary, not only to persuade the Target and everyone else in the department that she is crazy, but to make it the case that she actually stops trusting the veracity of her own experience. In extreme cases, such as in the film *Gaslight*, the Target is in fact driven mad—that is, she ceases to have ‘standing as a deliberator and moral agent’¹¹³ such that she can make claims that would pose a disagreement, critique, or challenge to the Gaslighter.

Abramson stresses the moral darkness of this manipulative behaviour, which is striking in the context of a Kantian account: ‘The problem with contempt, according to Kantians, is that it involves regarding a person *as though* she were outside the moral community. Gaslighting attempts to *make it the case* that a person is in fact no longer properly regarded as a full member of the moral community, because she doesn’t in fact have that independent standing.’¹¹⁴ Gaslighting affects both the Target and the community around her, ensuring that no one remains to treat the Target as if she still has an intact moral and deliberative standpoint.

¹¹³ ‘Turning up the Lights’, 8.

¹¹⁴ Abramson, 16.

The mechanisms of gaslighting are diverse, but at the core of the phenomenon is the destruction of the Target's ability to make claims, which seems straightaway to bear some resemblance to silencing. In silencing, whatever challenges a speaker might try to make to someone will, of course, not be taken by the silencer to actually *be* challenges, because the silencer refuses to grant uptake of the utterance *qua* challenge (refusal of L2). Instead, the utterance may be construed as some other kind of speech act (i.e., 'Perhaps she is hysterical, or lying to get attention'), thereby forcing the speaker's intended illocutionary act to fail.

Similarly, by withholding uptake of the Target's locutions as claims constituting actual challenges, the Gaslighter forces the Target's illocutionary aims to fail. But gaslighting goes further. Abramson elaborates:

...it's not only at this level that gaslighting is 'silencing' in Langton's sense. Insofar as the target of gaslighting is regarded as crazy, it's not merely particular utterances that will fail to have what would otherwise be their illocutionary force, but anything she says. And insofar as gaslighting is actually successful, it undermines the target's ability to take her own words, thoughts, reactions or views as having the force they otherwise would... Successful gaslighting, in this way, involves what might be aptly thought of as a kind of *existential silencing*.¹¹⁵

The concept of existential silencing is valuable for understanding how the stronger forms of moral damage are accomplished by the accrual of the comparatively 'minor' harms of individual incidents. What begins as fragmentation and disintegration has a cumulative effect of dehumanising and depersonalising someone.

For Bartky, it is the damage to a person's *autonomy* which damages their status as a moral agent, resulting in psychological oppression.¹¹⁶ With silencing, the damage to a person's capacity for autonomous speech damages their overall status as moral agents. And under Abramson's description, gaslighting can be seen as encompassing both of these kinds of moral damage to a comprehensive

¹¹⁵ Abramson, 17–18, italics mine.

¹¹⁶ see also Stark, 'Gaslighting, Misogyny, and Psychological Oppression'.

extent: silencing mounts from the incidental, to the constitutive, and then to the outright existential bad luck of having one's standing as a member of the moral community undermined or even destroyed.

If we want to understand what is the worst that could happen when refusing to listen to someone, we must understand that to inflict moral damage against a person, even in its mildest forms, can be a step along the way to destroying that person existentially.¹¹⁷ This does not mean that every failure to listen or every elbow bump on the metro station platform is a comparably granular, morally damaging assault on the personhood of the vulnerable person. A raindrop on the side of a mountain does not constitute a flood; nevertheless, just as a concentrated onslaught of raindrops can cause a flash flood dangerous enough to scrape out a canyon, so can incidents on the rising scale of hostile refusal to listen to someone cause illocutionary disablement which, potentially, can contribute to the constitutive fragmentation and dis-integration of someone's autonomy as a speaker and participant in the community of moral discourse.

These metaphors of cumulative damage could lead to a question about whether the minor scope of a single incident can excuse a refusal to listen to someone. One might argue that because she is—only today, in this particular case—refusing to listen to the person rather than full-on gaslighting them, that her actions are not all that harmful and do not warrant the judgement of moral blameworthiness associated with forms of moral damage. I think this objection flows out of a problematic view of the isolability of incidents—what Springer refers to as 'an implicit atomism about action' and an 'assimilation of speech activity to discrete speech acts', which we ought to resist.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ About the difference in scope between incidents and gaslighting as a whole, Abramson writes: 'A single instance of one person saying to another, "that's crazy" may not appear—may not *be*—an instance of someone trying to destroy another's standing to make claims. But when that form of interaction is iterated over and over again, when counterevidence to "that's crazy" is dismissed, when nothing is treated as salient evidence for the possibility of disrupting the initial accusation, appearances shift.' See Abramson, 'Turning up the Lights', 11.

¹¹⁸ Springer, *Communicating Moral Concern*, 101.

The refuser of reciprocity could choose to limit their moral calculus to include only their own one-off refusal to listen to someone, and so come up with an account by which they are not causing any discernible moral damage. However, such limitations appear disingenuous when we consider that the listener has no control over (and may have no knowledge of) the extent to which the speaker has been subject to constant, consistent refusal from other listeners. She may be under a substantial amount of psychological oppression already and may even have sustained severe moral damage from gaslighting. The listener may be, wittingly or unwittingly, part of a system in which the speaker is systematically silenced. If that were so, then suddenly the listener's 'isolated incident' appears less isolable.

Caring About the Droplet

It is tempting to try to justify a refusal to listen by presenting it as a small droplet, an isolated instance, which does not cause great amounts of harm. This justification fails because it depends on ignoring the possibility that a speaker has already endured substantial harms in order to justify the bad listener for colluding with, or adding to, the moral damage which the speaker has already sustained. When we adequately account for the context and history of moral damage suffered, we hold as blameworthy those who, out of hostility, refuse to make repairs when accidents are brought to light, in addition to those who perpetrate wilfully hostile programmes of comprehensive refusal to listen to someone, such as the extreme gaslighter.

The account given here does not serve to tell us exactly how a practical morality of listening should work, but it does show us where the moral significance of listening comes from. We praise listeners whom we take to offer normal reciprocity, recognising our utterances for what they are and allowing us to participate in discourse with integrity. We blame listeners whom we take to be withholding reciprocity, refusing to recognise our utterances for what they are, and disallowing us to participate in discourse as our whole, unfragmented selves.

This chapter has responded to the question of why listening matters to us in the way that it does. Particularly, if it is a moral issue, what kinds of stakes and

goods ground our judgements of listeners as praiseworthy or blameworthy? We shall see the themes of silencing, fragmentation, and gaslighting recur in Chapter 4 and following, as we begin building the more technical account of praiseworthy and blameworthy listening behaviours, and the way they affect us and our communities. But first, we need to get a clearer look at what kinds of actions and action structures we need to be evaluating to make sense of how listening actually works, beyond the simple matter of not flouting the expected reciprocity by withholding uptake. That is the purpose of Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Listening to People: Using Social Psychology to Spotlight an Overlooked Virtue¹¹⁹

And the strength needed to listen to something unheard of might actually fail, precisely because things may be unhearable when listening has only been trained to pay, effortlessly, the minimum price established by dominant logics.

—Gemma Corradi Fiumara¹²⁰

We shift now from talking about the harms at stake when listening goes wrong, to talking about listening as a positive practice, something which is a good that we intuitively look for in our conversations which contributes to the flourishing of both speaker and listener. The refrain I typically hear when I talk to professional listeners – therapists, doctors, teachers, and consultants – about what it means to be a good listener is that they wish they had a better vocabulary for talking about *how* to do listening well, so that they can more reflectively practice the skills of the listener and improve their practice. It is difficult to strive to be a good listener, let alone to recognise what it feels like when one is succeeding

¹¹⁹ This chapter develops work that was previously published as Susan E Notess, “Listening to People: Using Social Psychology to Spotlight an Overlooked Virtue,” *Philosophy* 94, no. 04 (October 2019): 621–43, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819118000529>. It is included here with permission.

¹²⁰ Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language*, 91.

at being a good listener, if one does not first have a clear grasp of what the *tasks* of listening are.

The aim of the present chapter is to give a preliminary articulation of what those tasks are, focusing in a loosely phenomenological way on how we tend to talk about what does or does not count as listening, and what it is like to listen or not listen in these ways. For this purpose, we need a way to talk about how a listener's motivation or intention is related to their perceptions of speakers and to their particular responsive actions that virtue theoretic accounts call for, and which is necessitated by the complex varieties of particular behaviours which may characterise listening (or not), from one situation to the next. We also need a way to narrate what the listener is doing, such that we keep motivation and intentions in focus.

I proceed as follows. In Section 1, I give a brief overview of the rather limited literature available covering the issue of listening, and in particular, listening as a virtue, to show why these accounts are inadequate. In Section 2, I offer some alternative resources for articulating the ethical structure of the experience of listening to someone: Gilbert Ryle's notions of courses of action as policies of infra-doings, and Linda Zagzebski's account of intellectual virtues. In Section 3 I discuss the variation in levels of salience that we perceive in different voices, and the salience-based heuristics which lend efficiency to our responses to others, but which also can breed unjust unresponsiveness towards others. Social psychology of persuasion and attitude change furnishes us with vocabulary for talking about such efficiencies and the alternative, other-centring mode of responding to messages, so that we can look at how the listening agent engages with their own perceptual and motivational tendencies.

In Section 4, using the language of salience and persuasion, I argue that to listen to someone (justly) is to establish a relation to that person under which the speaker's messages are not debarred from higher-effort, content-based modes of processing but are centred by the listener. To refuse to listen to someone is to obstruct the transmission of their communicative meanings by employing

salience-based efficiency measures in such a way as to block their message from more central routes of processing. (5) I discuss the refinement of skilful listening behaviour and what it looks like, in theory, for someone to be a fully virtuous listener.

A note before I proceed: the question inevitably arises about what to call a person who does not rightly respond to a speaker, being perhaps a poor/unvirtuous listener, or not a listener at all. To preserve the clarity of the roles in the communicative exchange, I refer to the non-speaking, respondent participant of the dialogue as a 'listener' regardless of whether in a given scenario the person actually does listen. The result is that I may at time refer to a listener who is not listening: I embrace the jarring dissonance between the person's conversational role and their behaviour as a natural critique of the ethical failure nascent in a person's failure to fulfil their role as a listener.

1. Overview of Virtue-Based Accounts of Listening

There are a few theoretical accounts of listening available. Educational theorist Suzanne Rice¹²¹ argues that good listening is a wholesale intensification of attention and narrowing of focus to auditory stimuli, such that one who listens well must both intensify and narrow the field of her attention in order to closely engage with a single speaker, to the exclusion of other stimuli. However, what constitutes a good practice of listening varies in different situations, sometimes even requiring simultaneous alertness to a broad array of stimuli.

Since a broad form of listening would be the opposite of the wholesale attention-intensification and narrowing Rice prescribes as the iconic meaning of good listening, she concludes that listening cannot be a singular virtue. For example, at many times during a typical day it would be unvirtuous of a classroom teacher to intensely and narrowly listen to one student, instead of monitoring and attending to the class as a whole via a more diffuse form of attention. Rice therefore posits that there are multiple irreconcilable tasks referred to under

¹²¹ Rice, 'Toward an Aristotelian Conception of Good Listening'.

‘listening virtuously’, which, being so varied and applying to such differing circumstances, do not bear further theorisation together under the notion of listening being a virtue as such.¹²²

Philosopher Joseph Beatty,¹²³ like Rice, argues that listening is related to many other elements of virtuousness, but his solution is to cast good listening as both a virtue and a meta-virtue similar to *phronesis*,¹²⁴ because good listening is a route to the refinement of virtues in general. Beatty’s conception of listening is the taking of a particularly detached, neutral position from which to respond to others, which not only results in right communicative responsiveness (listening as a virtue) but in the increased pursuit and acquisition of virtues in general (listening as a meta-virtue).

Haroutunian-Gordon and Laverty¹²⁵ offer an overview of accounts of listening through the history of philosophy, few as they are, emphasizing again the pragmatic role of the listener in soliciting the speaker’s meaning as a route to increased social or epistemic understanding, rather than emphasizing the moral aspects of such solicitous activity. Interestingly, in Haroutunian-Gordon and Laverty’s collection, Leonard Waks¹²⁶ represents John Dewey as holding listening to be primarily a democratic virtue, in that active listening is an effort to see all voices duly included in discourse – a view which shares resonances with that offered below. This higher-altitude view of listening merits further exploration as

¹²² I am not convinced that the variety of listening-related tasks required of the virtuous person makes listening a poor candidate for inclusion in an arsenal of virtues. On the contrary, it seems that one particularly useful strength of virtue ethics is its ability to cope with virtues whose manifestations can take a wide variety of forms. To be courageous can take the form of all kinds of unrelated activities, from charging into battle, to initiating a conversation, to undergoing surgery to donate a kidney. More on this strategy of categorisation in Section 2.

¹²³ Beatty, ‘Good Listening’.

¹²⁴ In describing listening as a meta-virtue, Beatty writes that it is ‘a “virtue of virtue” in that it is a fundamental avenue of understanding one’s own and the other’s character and occasioning its transformation’ (Beatty, 281.).

¹²⁵ Haroutunian-Gordon and Laverty, ‘Listening’.

¹²⁶ Waks, ‘John Dewey on Listening and Friendship in School and Society’.

relates to the view I offer below, but in the present work, I leave aside the political register of listening in favour of a more focused look at how the process of listening itself actually works.

The account I argue for here sits between Rice's scepticism and Beatty's enthusiasm for classing listening as such as a virtue. Like both of them, I am focused on the moral meaning of listening rather than on listening as a purely empirical tool, although, again like both Rice and Beatty, I follow the Aristotelian tradition of positing an intimate relation between moral and intellectual virtues, as a result of which the empirical curiosity for truth driving the accounts of Fiumara and those in Haroutunian-Gordon and Lavery's view would be a relevant reason for striving to develop the intellectual virtue(s) related to listening.

Inspiring my account is Miranda Fricker's theory of the virtue of Epistemic Justice,¹²⁷ in which she highlights the dually moral and intellectual (epistemic) nature of justice in the testimonial context. For this reason, I follow Fricker in taking as my point of departure Zagzebski's work on intellectual virtues,¹²⁸ since Zagzebski's definition of a virtue in general is designed to accommodate both moral and intellectual virtues in a manner that is derived from, and yet more unified than, Aristotle's founding account of the two kinds of virtue – moral and intellectual virtue – in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹²⁹ I say more about Zagzebski's account in Section 2.

Since I have selected as my explanandum here, as in the previous chapters, not just auditory stimuli but conversational exchanges in general, including sign language and written exchanges, I diverge straightaway from Rice's view that listening is simplistically a narrowing intensification of auditory attention. As I have already emphasized, an adequate theory of listening must account for its predominantly interpersonal rather than sensory function. Those who employ the capacity of listening in a virtuous manner would be virtuous listeners; to specify

¹²⁷ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.

¹²⁸ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*.

¹²⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

such an attribution, what we need is a way to identify the specific interpersonal value of the excellence that a virtuous listener possesses. By aligning this interpersonal excellence with the family of virtues having to do with justice, we can account for what it means to listen virtuously across a broad array of situational requirements, keeping in focus the particular social meaning of listening to someone rather than foregrounding the diversity of perceptual and linguistic systems and operations that can be involved in listening. To act justly has as many different manifestations as there are different situations requiring justice. To listen justly likewise has far more manifestations than simply amplifying and focusing attention to auditory stimuli in the selective way that raised Rice's concerns.

Beatty prioritises the interpersonal element rather than the perceptual element of listening with his winner-take-all theory of listening – construing listening as a virtue *and* a meta-virtue, rather than focusing on the perceptual definitions of the verb 'to listen' – in which perceptual systems simply serve the social enterprise of listening, which is optimised under conditions of detachment. Making detachment central to an account of listening strikes me as a counter-intuitive choice, considering how much emphasis Beatty places on the interpersonal rather than perceptual nature of listening. Indeed, it seems straightforward that good listening involves resisting the distorting effects of strong prejudices and unwarranted biases, but I am sceptical whether detachment is the best strategy to employ against such distortions. Instead, a satisfactory account of listening should explain how becoming a virtuous listener involves training oneself to respond justly to the speech of others through attentive *engagement* with what they are saying, rather than detachment.

To facilitate such a view, I cast the excellence by which one listens virtuously as an excellence of justice; that is, to be virtuous as a listener involves seeking to establish and maintain just relationships with interlocutors. This claim fits naturally into the ecological frame discussed in the first chapter, whereas the Message in a Bottle framework would have difficulty incorporating it. Moreover,

the need for understanding listening has having to do with establishing and maintaining just relationships with interlocutors is made evident in the discussion in Chapter 2 of how social and political discrepancies contribute to the moral harm that can be brought about by vicious failures of listening. *Contra* Beatty, the virtue of listening justly should arguably be seconded to the meta-virtue of justice¹³⁰ and, like Fricker's virtue of epistemic justice, function as a hybrid moral and intellectual virtue. This picture serves as our 'working understanding' of listening for the remainder of this chapter.

2. Listening as a Policy of Infra-doings

The specific activities that can be associated with listening are a diverse array, including but not limited to perceptual, linguistic, relational, and cognitive faculties. Further, a good listener may take various steps to reassure a speaker of her attention, such as by closing a door to remove distractions; bending down to eye level when attending to a speaking child; verbally committing to leaving a conversation unresolved, or promising the speaker that she will continue listening and trying to understand his point of view. So, it is important to specify what activities are themselves to be taken as constitutive of listening, and which activities are subordinate functions, contingently incorporated into the process of listening according to the requirements of particular scenarios.

If listening is taken to be constituted by something as specific as 'closing a door' or 'bending down to eye level' – both tasks which in some instance support listening but may at times be irrelevant or even obstructive to listening – then we run the risk of being like Gilbert Ryle's boy at the zoo,¹³¹ who is on a quest to take a photograph of a mammal. With dismay the boy passes by signs for bears, foxes, lions, and monkeys but never finds an enclosure marked as containing 'mammals'. To avoid such a category mistake and correctly identify the activity of listening, we

¹³⁰ Aristotle, Book V.

¹³¹ Ryle, 'Courses of Action or the Uncatchableness of Mental Acts', 333–34.

need to identify listening with the broader category of action that controls the array of more specific subordinate actions such as those listed above.

To address activities that are best assessed at the broader category level, Ryle provides the idea of a *course of action*,¹³² which functions much as a policy that controls a potentially enormous array of subordinate activities. He gives the example of seven people waiting on a station platform for a train. There is no one discrete action that is, precisely, 'waiting'. One person does a crossword puzzle; one smokes a pipe, and one chats to another. Of these various meantime activities, Ryle says,

For to wait for a train is (nearly enough) intentionally-*not-to-move-far-from-where-the-wanted-train-is-due-to-come-in-at-any-moment-before-it-comes-in...* Between the seven or seventy such *infra*-things that the seven train awaiting travellers were witnessed in the act of doing there need have been no visible, audible or introspective similarities. The significant, though unphotographable and unintrospectable similarity was their common *Supra*-policy, namely, their all alike resolutely not doing any of the various things that would remove them far from the train's arrival platform.¹³³

Ryle's notion of a course of action is well suited to describe many of the complex undertakings that fill our lives. Listening to someone, much like waiting for a train, is not a singular action but a course of action, a policy which coordinates the myriad choices and activities sprinkled throughout an extended period of time towards the accomplishment of a given purpose. To listen to someone is, to mimic Ryle's style of description, intentionally-to-establish-a-relationship-of-adequate-responsiveness-to-someone-so-as-*not-to-close-oneself-to-her-communicative-attempts*. To achieve this end, a person does not merely engage in the mundane activities supporting the perceptual processing of the speaker's linguistic signal. A listener also engages in the cognitive work of attending to the level of effort that she gives to processing the speaker's message, ensuring that the effort level is sufficient to duly facilitate the speaker's communicative prospects. The mundane

¹³² Ryle, 335.

¹³³ Ryle, 340.

perceptual activities and cognitive attentional work that go into listening are *infra-doings*, coordinated by a policy and aimed at accomplishing a certain course of action. The *infra-doings* of listening are explored in their various forms throughout this Chapter and those that follow, with Chapter 5 especially examining the conversational *infra-doings* most intimately related to the course of action of listening to someone.

A key element to notice at this juncture is the way that listening involves establishing relationships such that a person will deal *adequately* with another person's speech, according to the requirements of a given scenario. To deal inadequately with a person's speech is to close oneself off prematurely to her communicative attempt, to assume on the basis of surface features of the scenario that what the person is saying can be dismissed without any further attention. On such a view, to not listen to someone is something more than merely mishearing or not hearing her; as Chapter 2 makes clear, problems of perception or auditory processing can be repaired easily enough, but problems of listening arise when the listener is not *willing* to let a speaker's claims go through. To not listen to someone is to close oneself to that person's communicative endeavour prematurely, withholding uptake in bad faith, and silencing the speaker with respect to the particular communicative act being attempted.

The difference between what these concepts pick out can be seen in how we would describe a situation in which a lifeguard orders swimmers out of a pool, and one swimmer fails to respond to the lifeguard's instructions. If the swimmer was underwater at the time of the instruction and simply did not hear the lifeguard, we would not say that the swimmer 'did not listen' to the lifeguard, but that he 'did not hear' the lifeguard. If the swimmer were a foreign tourist who does not know the language the lifeguard used, we say he 'did not understand' the lifeguard. But if the swimmer heard the lifeguard, understood the language and the meaning of all the words used, and yet refused to display an appropriate form of *responsiveness* to the instruction, we have an example of someone who did not *listen*, because the swimmer has made a judgement about what the speech of the

lifeguard means for him and requires of him, and the judgement he makes is conspicuously inappropriate to the situation.

When we talk about whether a person is listening, we are talking about the judgements that the person is making about their level of responsiveness to what a speaker is saying, where the level of responsiveness refers to three main components, beginning with (1) the judgement the listener makes about the possible *importance* of what the speaker says. This judgement in turn informs the listener's policy with regard to (2) the level of effort the person is willing to put towards processing the speaker's message. Furthermore, when a person judges a speaker's speech as something important in some way – be it important to her as a source of information, or perhaps important because it is important to the speaker – she in effect establishes for herself a policy of responsiveness to the speaker that involves (3) a decision about her openness to persuasion, such as a decision not to dismiss out of hand what the speaker says. The further measures she takes to understand and determine her replies will vary according to the particulars of the situation.

Alternatively, when a person establishes a policy of non-responsiveness to a speaker, the person is judging the speaker's speech as unimportant, whether because the listener simply does not care about what the speaker has to say, or because she is committed to a belief that what the speaker says is unreliable or sure to be wrong. Such a non-responsiveness policy is what we pick out when we accuse people of not just failing, but refusing to listen to us. Whatever stance a listener takes towards a speaker can be viewed as a policy of responsiveness towards the speaker. Whether the policy is supportive or obstructive, the policy can be cashed out in terms of the same three factors given above. As such, whether we consider a person to be listening to someone turns on what sort of policy of responsiveness the listener establishes towards the speaker, based on (1) judgements she makes about the possible content or importance of the person's speech, (2) the level of effort she contributes to processing the person's message, and (3) the decision she makes about her openness to persuasion by the speaker.

Taken together, these elements of a policy of responsiveness form the basis for construing listening as an inherently moral concept—like honesty or kindness, wheeled out specifically for making normative judgements, as discussed in Chapter 1—since taking up a policy of responsiveness involves taking a stance on the importance of a person’s speech and the level of processing effort due her.¹³⁴ We would ordinarily say that when a person hears and processes bits of language, she listens *just in case* she meets the other person’s speech with a policy of responsiveness that involves adequately and rightly taking into consideration what the person has said. To suggest that someone has listened carefully but towards sinister ends is to suggest the person is doing something other than ‘listening well’. Although they have perhaps skilfully and adeptly navigated the implicatures, they cannot be said to have *adequately and rightly* handled the other person’s speech, as any manipulative sitcom antagonist shows: she understands a speaker’s meaning and responds skilfully, but she is not ‘a good listener’. Thus, we can say that to possess the excellence of listening to people is to possess both the right motivation to bring about the ends of the speaker’s success and the skill in bringing about that success.

By these features we can categorise listening as a virtue. But in order to be clear about what it is that lends listening its moral structure, I refer to the virtue as ‘listening justly’. It is then easy enough to say that someone who listens unjustly has failed to get listening right because of a problem in the motivational component of the virtue of listening, even though all the subordinate skills of

¹³⁴ Compare, for example, what Lovibond writes about the concept or *Bildung* of a virtue providing “a stable point of view with which we can identify for the purpose of talking about the ‘demands’ of, say, courage, and of the courageous person as ‘responding’ to these; and when we do talk in this ethically loaded way (as opposed to saying simply that A faced the danger while B ran away), we demonstrate our investment in the forces that direct *Bildung* and that designate certain behaviour-patterns as the ones flowing from a ‘clear perception’ of the ethical” (Sabina Lovibond, *Essays on Ethics and Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 79–80.). To describe something as ‘courageous’ rather than describing bare actions just is to take a stance on the ethical quality of certain actions; likewise, to describe someone as listening well rather than employing any other of a litany of more barely descriptive verbs (like hearing, paying attention, understanding, believing...) is to take a stance on the ethical rightness of the way in which those other verbal activities were deployed.

listening are present in terms of the capacities for hearing, paying attention, understanding the language, and drawing implicatures. This is typical of, and, as I have said, is a feature of theorising an excellence as a virtue: to be an excellent listener, one should have the right sort of motivations (to respond justly to speakers), the right perception of the situations at hand (attending to how one is perceiving the voice of the other), and the skill to bring about the right kind of outcomes (being adequately and rightly responsive). I call this the *Trifecta* of excellences: motivation, perception, and producing outcomes. A virtuous listener has integrated all three excellences.

I derive the notion of a virtue as a Trifecta of excellences from Zagzebski's definition of a virtue, which is as follows:

A virtue, then, can be defined as a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end. What I mean by a motivation is a disposition to have a motive; a motive is an action guiding emotion with a certain end, either internal or external.¹³⁵

At the core of this definition are two familiar components: motivation towards an end, and reliable success in bringing about that end. To have reliable success in bringing about an end involves, at least at the beginning, having a skill or set of skills. When the deployment of those skills has become a consistent habit, on account of the person's having a disposition towards using those skills in the right times and in the right ways, towards the right people, this person is said to possess the relevant virtue.

Listening is an intriguing case because, like talking, it is a basic human capacity essential for communication, and as such, all interpersonal exchanges are characterised by *how*, rather than whether or how much, the participants deploy these two communicative capacities. Thus, to listen virtuously follows a different pattern than generosity, for example. To be generous is to give one's resources to

¹³⁵ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 137.

others for their benefit, potentially at loss to oneself. A person is viewed as more or less generous according to whether, and how much, the person gives to others.

Listening virtuously follows a pattern more like that of Aristotle's speech related virtues of truthfulness and ready wit,¹³⁶ in that whenever one speaks, it is not the mere presence of speaking-behaviour that is virtuous, but the quality of that speech as truthful or untruthful, as lacking or possessing wit, which for Aristotle forms the basis for judging the virtuousness of the speaker with respect to truthfulness and ready wit, respectively. Someone who has ready wit speaks at the right times and in the right ways, just like someone who listens virtuously listens to the right extent,¹³⁷ not short-changing speakers with curtailed attention or a refusal to engage in processing the content of what the speaker is saying, but establishing a relationship to the speaker in which one does not foreclose the speaker's communicative possibilities by giving inadequate attention to what she says. To get a clearer picture of what this right relationship to a speaker looks like when one does not foreclose her possibilities, let us look at what the listener is doing.

3. The Hidden Tasks of Listening: Salience-Response and Elaboration

To be sure, a listener deploys a variety of skilful infra-doings, which ordinarily are highly automated, like parsing an auditory linguistic signal; opening and reading a text message; identifying what sort of speech act is occurring (is it a request or a suggestion?), and drawing the relevant implicatures needed to understand the meaning and import of what has been said. These infra-doings may become conspicuous or more-than-usually intentional when the communicative process is obstructed by noise, linguistic error or inability on the

¹³⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IV.

¹³⁷ Aristotle does mention listening briefly in his description of the virtue of ready wit, saying "there is such a thing as saying – and again listening to – what one should and as one should" (Aristotle, 102-03.). He was right to note that there is such a thing as rightness in what one listens to and how, but his mere bracketed mention suggests that there is rather little to be said about listening rightly, compared to the important matter of speaking rightly. Needless to say, I disagree.

part of the speaker, or when there is difficulty understanding. These infra-doings support hearing, reading, and understanding, which are as well infra-doings of the listening course of action. To describe the policy that is itself picked out by the verb 'listening', we require the concept of responsiveness described in the preceding section, where policies of responsiveness include both spontaneous, unthought reactions to a person's speech and thoughtful judgements about how one will respond to a speaker. We are more responsive to some people than to others, depending on a variety of factors, which leads to imbalances in the communicative potential of different speakers.

Such communicative imbalances can be understood, I propose, in terms of the power of the voices¹³⁸ involved in an exchange, especially the power of the voices to persuade or to gainsay each other. This power takes two forms. One is salience – that is, the immediate perceptual affective force of a voice. Voices of those whom we are inclined to trust are highly salient. Salience can increase on the basis of perceived prestige and gravitas, and the favourability, accessibility, or intelligibility of what is being said. Salience can rise or fall on the basis of age, gender, race, accent, diction, dress, and skill in using conventions of politeness, spelling, and social ritual. These lists are far from comprehensive. The other form which vocal power takes derives from the listener's engagement with the content of what the speaker is saying. Someone who makes compelling arguments, using strong rhetoric and citing reliable sources and statistics, has more power to persuade me than someone who provides me with few such details for consideration. A person's vocal power can increase according to her rhetorical

¹³⁸ I am not referring to the volume of the literal voice of a person, as in the sound produced by the larynx. Rather, I am using 'voice' in the same way we talk about having a voice in a conversation, which we often use to refer to spoken participation in person, or to representation of a person or set of people's views in a broader social discourse. For present purposes, in referring to a person's 'voice' I am referring to their capacity to communicate their concerns and their power to persuade. As such, the power of my 'voice' is relevant to my listening activity, even when my interlocutor is the one speaking. To clarify, think of the listener's voice as pointing to what the listener *would* say about the matter if she were speaking, and the power of her voice as pointing to the strength of her beliefs about the matter.

abilities even if she lacks certain salience-building features, as in the case of a dry, boring expert whose views are sought out and trusted despite a lack of charisma.

To clarify the difference between salience and content as features moderating vocal power, we will be helped by importing and repurposing some terminology from empirical studies in social psychology, concerned with persuasion and attitude change in contexts including, but not limited to, messaging in commercial advertising and political campaigning. Whilst empirical studies of attitude change have been popular from the early decades of social psychology research in the 1920s,¹³⁹ it was not until the beginning of the 1980s that theories of attitude change found their feet, when two theories emerged: Petty and Cacioppo's theory which has become known as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM),¹⁴⁰ and Chaiken's theory, known as the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM).¹⁴¹ Both models succeeded in coping with the above-mentioned complexity by positing two main processes of attitude change, rather than one. In this respect, these two theories 'have more in common than they have points of divergence',¹⁴² and have together formed the foundation for much of the literature in persuasion studies since.

Whilst either of these theories would suit my purposes, I focus primarily on ELM, which proposes that the processes giving rise to attitude change fall on a continuum:

...defined by how motivated and able people are to assess the central merits of a person, issue, or position... The more motivated and able people are to

¹³⁹ Paul A. M. van Lange, Arie W. Kruglanski, and E. Tory Higgins, *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012), 224, 246.

¹⁴⁰ Petty, Richard E. and Wegener, 'Attitude Change: Multiple Roles for Persuasion Variables', in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Daniel T. Gilbert, Susan T. Fiske, and Gardner Lindzey (McGraw-Hill, 1997), 326–28.

¹⁴¹ Lange, Kruglanski, and Higgins, *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, 246–66.

¹⁴² Lange, Kruglanski, and Higgins, 226.

assess the central merits of the attitude object, the more likely they are to effortfully scrutinize all available object-relevant information.¹⁴³

The term *elaboration* refers to the cognitive activity involved in effortful scrutiny. Where people are highly motivated and able to consider the content and context of a message, they engage in a high level of elaboration on the message. This process of attitude change is referred to as the *central route* of persuasion. When people are less motivated to engage in effortful elaboration, attitude change can result from less effortful processes, investing less in scrutinizing the message and responding more to salience cues and, as Chaiken rightly emphasizes, heuristics. Attitude change arrived at through low elaboration processes occurs through the *peripheral route*.

A myriad of motivational and situational factors influences whether a message is processed more via the central route or the peripheral route – that is, whether a person engages in a high degree of elaboration and reflective scrutiny of content, or depends on efficiency measures like heuristics and salience cues to make judgements about the message.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, according to each of the major contemporary models of attitude change including single as well as dual process models, “attitudes based on high amounts of thought are proposed to be more persistent over time, resistant to attack, and predictive of behavior than attitudes formed or changed with little thought.”¹⁴⁵

As I have said above, we naturally find certain voices more salient to us than others. Suppose Sally’s voice holds little salience for Joe on matters of driving and navigation, because Sally does not know how to drive. If Sally presents Joe with a message he is disinclined to accept – perhaps she is telling him that he has taken a wrong turn at the last roundabout – his tendency will be to dismiss what she is saying on the basis of little elaboration. The *assumption* he makes, correctly

¹⁴³ Petty, Richard E. and Wegener, ‘Attitude Change: Multiple Roles for Persuasion Variables’, 326.

¹⁴⁴ Lange, Kruglanski, and Higgins, *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, 231.

¹⁴⁵ Jamie Barden and Richard E. Petty, ‘The Mere Perception of Elaboration Creates Attitude Certainty: Exploring the Thoughtfulness Heuristic’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95, no. 3 (September 2008): 489, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012559>.

or not, is that because he perceives her to be an unreliable source and her message is unappealing, he can safely dismiss it without devoting a high degree of time and effortful activity elaborating on her message, 'reassuring' her confidently that he is on the correct road.

Joe is unlikely to listen to Sally unless she makes a specific bid for him to do so. When she indignantly cries, "You're not listening to me! I saw the sign for the turn we were meant to take. Do you really recognise this road?" she is asking Joe to abandon his heuristics on the basis of which he has been screening her message, and to instead engage with the actual content of her message. Perhaps if Joe does so, he will find that she has a valid point that is worth taking seriously, despite his initial assumptions and confidence in his navigational abilities over hers. Because the salience of her voice is low, and her message is aversive to his self-concept as a superior navigator, he is not likely to be persuaded by her unless he makes a concession of elaboration in processing her message. This is something he might be unlikely to do, based on his peripheral judgements about Sally, unless she makes a point of asking him to engage more fairly with her message itself.

Alternatively, suppose a stranger whose voice has no particular salience to Joe offers him a message that he has no particular reason to contest. As Joe approaches his car in a car park, a stranger in a high-visibility jacket tells him that a certain bridge is flooded and that he should take an alternative route. It is likely that Joe will respond agreeably to the message via the peripheral, low-elaboration route. Although the stranger's voice has no personal salience for Joe, the non-adverse message is accompanied with the salience-booster of a high-visibility jacket. Joe is likely to be persuaded by the testimony without elaboration.¹⁴⁶

What this language gives us is a way to conceptualise the activity constitutive of listening as a function of the listener's responsiveness to the

¹⁴⁶ I am sidestepping the considerable literature about epistemology of testimony, since the issue of whether a person listens to someone arises right where normal responsiveness to testimony ends. For one fairly recent overview, see the collection of essays edited by Lackey and Sosa (Lackey and Sosa, *The Epistemology of Testimony*).

speaker. The listener may by default take the speaker's voice to be authoritative, and so centres the speaker's message by reflex. The listener may alternatively hold the speaker's voice to be important to him, and so centres the speaker's message by choice, in accordance with his policy of responsiveness towards that person. When this is so, the listener may even need to invest some work on the speaker's behalf, filling in the gaps in the spoken message or conscientiously resisting prejudice, in order to ensure that he captures the most viable interpretation of what the speaker is saying and centres it, in the dialogue and in his own view, in order to ensure that the speaker has the best possible chance of persuading him. As a paradigm case, consider a parent listening to a small child: the child's diction may be very unclear, her grammar lacking, and she doesn't know many words yet. Nevertheless, because her voice is deeply important to the parent, he or she will invest great amounts of effort in decoding the child's syllables and drawing inferences as necessary in order to discover what the child is trying to say.

On the other hand, a listener who fails or refuses to do this is he who instead employs against the speaker a policy of non-responsiveness. The speaker's voice is not taken to be important; the speaker's message will be processed with minimal effort from the listener on the speaker's behalf, and if the message is not amenable enough to the speaker to persuade him from the periphery, then it 'does not deserve' to be centred. On such a policy, rather than giving the speaker the best possible chance to succeed, the listener sets a metaphorical bouncer at the door of his more central processing route. Here it is not just a particular illocutionary aim that gets taken off the table in bad faith by the hostile listener, as in Chapter 2; rather, *whatever* it is that the speaker is saying will not be granted uptake—whether the listener has on some level grasped it or not. If a speaker's voice and message are not perceived to be amenable on the basis of salience cues and heuristic processing, they are not even admitted for due consideration, let alone offered the support of the listener investing his own elaborative effort in ensuring the most viable interpretation of the speaker's message gets through.

4. A Relation of Managed Openness

Thus far I have argued that listening is a virtue referring to a course of action, in that the tasks of listening include a wide variety of infra-doings subordinate to a policy of establishing a certain kind of relation to a speaker. That relation should be one of sufficient openness as to allow the listener to adequately and rightly respond to the speaker's message, which requires that the listener actively avoid closing herself off to the speaker's message. In ELM terms, the relation of openness established by a virtuous listener can be described as a commitment to not letting the salience-based efficiencies of peripheral route processing block a message from being processed by a more central route when required or requested. The core task of listening then is not the processing of speakers' *claims*, but the establishing and maintaining of such adequately open and responsive relations to *the speakers themselves*.

In the section that follows, I argue that the responsiveness of the listener does not entail that the listener always processes a person's speech through central routing; such a policy would be inefficient and unnecessary. Instead, the responsive listener makes use of both peripheral and central processing routes, but manages the routing of messages through those routes according to a policy by which the results of peripheral route processing cannot *block* or *preclude* a message from being centred in the listener's attention when called for.

The moral significance of managing how one routes messages emerges when we view the routing as an opportunity for equalising the power difference between our voices and those of others. By dedicating our elaboration efforts to the communicative attempts of those we might otherwise find questionable, we give them a fairer chance to be heard and to persuade. Likewise, if a message's content seems garbled, but I recognise the speaker as someone who is probably reliable despite being unskilled in our language, then I could use these salience cues to motivate a highly engaged, gap-filling level of elaboration to ensure I adequately process the message. As our perceptions and heuristics are developed over time and become refined and made more reliable, our activity of listening

serves to interrogate the assumptions we are primed to make about the voices of others.

A fully virtuous listener would be one who habitually avoids the pitfall of dismissing others' claims on the basis of peripheral route processing where greater elaboration was required. On the way to developing such acuity, we err on the side of central processing, double-checking our judgements made via peripheral route processing by following them up with central route processing. When someone makes a direct appeal – 'You're not listening to me!' – we abandon our peripheral route options until we are confident we have done justice to the speaker in our consideration of their message.

By extension, when listening to small children or language learners whose voices' power is diminished due to limited language ability, we broaden the set of elaboration-related *infra-doings* involved in listening. The centring of the messages of linguistically limited voices using a high degree of elaboration from the listener may not correspond so much to a shift from salience-based reaction to reasoned response; rather, the shift towards effortful activity on the listener's part may correspond more to the listener committing a high degree of effort to piecing together the other person's message through patient close attention, guesswork, filling in the gaps, and devoting as much labour as necessary to the inferential labour of sussing out the speaker's meaning. In this claim I am extending the notions of elaboration and central route processing from their original meaning in social psychology, to include a broader set of activities that may be seconded to the course of action of listening to someone. At issue is the listener's investment of effortfulness in centring the speaker's message, as a factor of how much importance the listener places on the speaker and of the listener's willingness to respond duly to the speaker's communication. The following imagined scenario between Sally and her dentist illuminates the dynamics at play:

As a general rule, Sally does not expect her voice to hold a high level of salience when, to make chat, she tells her dentist that her mouth feels fine and seems healthy. Contrariwise, the diagnostic claims that the dentist makes as a

result of his examination of Sally's mouth hold a high degree of salience for Sally, who will likely believe whatever the dentist tells her on account of the dentist's professional expertise and having just performed a detailed exam. The white coat eliminates Sally's need to elaborate on the dentist's claims before believing them.

Now, suppose Sally feels terrible pain on one side of her mouth. She tells this to the dentist, who nevertheless persistently replies that everything looks perfectly fine: Sally is wrong to think she has a dental problem. Unconvinced, Sally makes a bid for the dentist to listen to her account, describing in detail what the pain feels like and where it is located. How the dentist responds to Sally's claims will reveal her policy of responsiveness towards her patient. In a normal encounter, because the dentist cares for his patient's wellbeing, the dentist would then centre Sally's claims in his attention. Using Sally's descriptions as clues to what problems he may be looking for, the dentist investigates until he is able to offer reasonably satisfactory diagnosis and treatment for Sally's pain. But suppose this dentist is a particularly unvirtuous, callous listener. He might persist in telling Sally that her mouth is perfectly fine despite the severe pain, perhaps even suggesting that Sally is imagining her pain, being overly dramatic, or lying. Because the callous dentist is unwilling to centre Sally's claims and clings exclusively to his heuristics, viewing patients as non-experts and unreliable diagnosticians of dental health, he dismisses Sally's claims without adequate elaboration and ultimately fails to provide the required dental care.

The foregoing example allows us to locate the specific wrong done to a speaker when one refuses to listen to her. The callous dentist's *commitment* to judging Sally's message on the basis of peripheral salience cues has the effect of blocking the message from her more central routes of processing. Contrary to the classic picture of listening as passive reception of speech, my account presents listening as involving active tasks of managing how one processes and responds to others on the basis of one's willingness to centre, elaborate on, and respond to the other person's speech. These tasks, together with a variety of other infra-doings, comprise the activity by which a listener establishes and maintains relationships

of greater or lower degrees of openness towards speakers, based on the listener's policy of responsiveness.

The openness of the relationship a listener maintains towards a speaker is of moral importance: to avoid wronging her in her capacity as a speaker, the listener must avoid blocking her voice from being centred on the basis of peripheral judgements about her importance or her message. To block someone in such a way is, simply, to refuse to listen to her. This view allows us to make sense of familiar comments like, "My boss sadly did not agree to my request, but at least she listened to me!" Such a comment usually indicates that the listener has given adequate consideration to the content of the speaker's claims and evidenced a sufficient degree of elaboration to assure the speaker that her claims were being taken seriously, even though the final result from the listener was not one of agreement. The boss is praised for listening because of how she managed her openness to the speaker's claims under a fair policy of responsiveness.

An advantage of identifying listening with this managed openness is that it allows us to avoid two pitfalls, namely, identifying listening with simply being persuaded, and identifying listening with processing all messages through maximally central routes. One who has mastered virtuous listening still has the option of processing some messages by peripheral routes, and still had the option to maintain her view rather than be persuaded by every message that comes her way. To explain how these options can remain open to a virtuous listener, let us now consider what the excellence looks like in one who is fully in possession of the virtue of listening justly.

5. Mastering the Virtue of Listening Justly

Naturally, the learning process for acquiring the virtue in question requires trial, error, and practice. Practising involves doubting and double checking one's instincts about which communicative encounters can be processed via peripheral routes. The notion of heuristics is particularly useful on this point. Heuristics arise on the basis of patterns which we can (presumably) expect to remain fairly stable. As a person accrues experience in interacting with different

kinds of people, the plurality of those experiences lends increasing nuance to the patterns the person trusts enough to deploy as a heuristic. By erring on the side of caution, double-checking peripheral judgements, and interrogating one's own listening practices, one's heuristics become attuned to note which situations call for higher levels of elaboration. Once a person becomes so well practised that she can consistently make right judgements about how much elaboration is required in a given situation to ensure that speakers are done justice, her efficiency measures do not mislead her from adequately listening to people.

The instinct-refining learning process establishes within the fully virtuous listener a stance of openness towards others which is just. The exemplary listener is rightly open, responsive, and attentive to others. Where those others have reduced communicative capacity or voices with low salience, the listener engages the speaker's communiques with increasingly high levels of elaboration, until justice is had. Rather than posing the ideal listener as someone who is maximally detached, I pose the ideal listener as someone who is maximally engaged, devoting higher levels of her own cognitive resources to the processing of speakers' messages in order to achieve justice.

While it is true that increased elaboration aims at rectifying a speaker's reduced communicative capacity by focusing the listener on the content of the speaker's message, this does not entail that the listener becomes more detached, *pace* Beatty,¹⁴⁷ but that the listener becomes increasingly invested in the people to whom she listens and in supporting them in their capacity as speakers. As such, I argue that the ends the listener has in view are to be sufficiently engaged in the communicative exchange to do justice to the speaker, rather than construing the ends as having to do with perfect understanding of or acquiescence to the speaker's message. Although these two might seem likely candidates for the ends of listening, they give rise to three problems.

¹⁴⁷ Beatty, 'Good Listening', 285–90.

First, taking an achievement – full understanding or acquiescence – as the ends of listening is problematic, since maintaining just policies of responsiveness is a dynamic and ongoing process. This virtue is not held to a bounded criterion, such as ‘fully grasping the speaker’s meaning’, nor, as I have said, can we take listening to entail agreement, belief, or compliance with a speaker’s desired result. We can in some cases see where people are satisfied with a person’s response in a communicative exchange, even though the results of the exchange are not what they wished. While people are more likely to accept someone’s non-agreeing or non-cooperating responses to us if we first feel that they have genuinely listened to us, there is no guarantee that successful listening will make for a satisfied speaker.

Second, problems arise if we postulate that the end or aim of listening is to grasp a full and complete understanding the speaker, since it is doubtful whether such a result is even possible, let alone in all cases desirable. Certainly, being understood would be an imagined *ideal* result to which many speakers aspire, but it is doubtful whether such an ideal is truly possible to achieve: how fully can one understand someone else’s experience? It is further doubtful that, even if a listener *should* happen to succeed in perfectly imagining the speaker’s experience, that the listener would be able to *know* that she had been so successful. Indeed, it often seems that when a listener claims to have fully understood exactly what the speaker feels, she curtails the speaker’s communicative efforts and can block the progress of the exchange, while a listener who acknowledges straightforwardly that she does *not* entirely understand the speaker’s experience has motivation to centre the speaker’s voice in an ongoing dialogue.

A third problem is that speakers may not always be able, in terms of their communicative abilities, to successfully convey what they want to say. As a matter of language processing, we might assume that one can only be successful as a listener in proportion to the linguistic and rhetorical success of the speaker, but this cannot be right. Not only would this assumption make the requirement for listening from those in authority dependent on the vulnerable communicative

skills of those under them, which would be worrisome, the assumption also contradicts the very premise of the work involved in listening. The parent assists the child in communicating; the doctor helps the patient to identify the correct descriptions for his experience, and the native speaker patiently uses her imagination to make sense of a language learner's unusual idiom, so that communication can occur despite language mistakes.

Therefore, in light of these three problems, the end of listening should not be pinned on an achievement construed as perfective, like having grasped or understood the other's meaning. Instead, listening more closely follows the unbounded structure of relational virtues like friendship, which is fulfilled not when the relationship with a friend is ended, but when it is established. Listening is in this way dissimilar to the more episodic manifestation of virtues like generosity in its most iconic form, the ends of which are fulfilled when the need for generosity has been met and the donation event has ceased. By identifying the ends of just listening as the establishing and maintaining of relationships of managed openness to the claims of others, we may be able to make sense of situations in which a listener never manages to understand quite what a speaker is saying, or does not manage to agree to what the speaker is saying, but nevertheless invests a great deal of effortful activity in centring the speaker's claims, refusing to block that speaker's access to the listener's central processing route or to consign that speaker's voice to the periphery of one's considerations.

Conclusion

What I have done in this chapter is to illuminate listening as an active practice, the mastery of which calls for excellence across the Trifecta of motivation, perception, and securing good outcomes. Listening is difficult to pin to a singular activity due to the wide array of behaviours which can be involved in listening, but as we have seen, this is because listening is an activity at the policy level, coordinating a diversity of subordinate Infra-doings in support of a policy of responsiveness towards a speaker. A policy of responsiveness involves making decisions about how important a speaker's words are, and on that basis, how much

effort we are willing to invest in centring and processing their messages. From this, it follows that how we listen to people is a key part of how we treat others, and so is important to our character. In this chapter we have been concerned with listening as a policy of responsiveness; in the chapters that follow we delve more into the infra-doings coordinated thereby.

A good listener is judicious in managing how she routes speakers' messages through peripheral (heuristic- and salience-based, low effort processing) or more central (content- and context-based, high effort processing) routes. If one chooses to treat a person in the manner of refusing to listen to her speech, blocking the speaker's message from having access to sufficiently central processing routes, one commits an injustice against the speaker. It remains for an account to be given about exactly *how* this injustice plays out through specific conversational behaviours and against the backdrop of the wider sociohistorical and political context of injustices writ large. The latter is the subject of Chapter 4, in which the motivational piece of the Trifecta is in central focus as we see how a shift in motivation leads to the cultivation of new habits of perception and action, and how these can spread through the wider social context.

Chapter 4

Listening in Public Discourse

“[Ecological thinking] infiltrates the interstices of the social order, where it expands to undermine its intransigent structures, as the ice of the Canadian winter expands to produce upheavals in the pavements and roads, working within/against these seemingly solid structures to disrupt their smooth surfaces.”

—Lorraine Code¹⁴⁸

“[I]t is the privileged and powerful who bear the responsibility for transforming hierarchies of attention which determine who and what can be heard.”

—Tanja Dreher & Poppy de Souza¹⁴⁹

Given the scope of agency damage and depersonalisation that can occur when a person refuses to listen to someone, we should be concerned about the scope of damage that occurs when society as a whole refuses to listen to certain voices, or when whole sets of voices are silenced out of public discourse. The argument I give in Chapter 2 concerns the harm which can be caused in one-to-one interactions, and how that harm can scale outward when such interactions are repeated and persistent. One unjust listener can contribute to the silencing of a person or group through individual vice; but what most of the silencing literature cited at the start of Chapter 2 is focused on is systemic patterns of injustice, not enacted through the malicious choices of solitary agents, but woven through the fabric of society. When one group of people is not able to participate in public

¹⁴⁸ Code, *Ecological Thinking*, 198.

¹⁴⁹ Tanja Dreher and Poppy de Souza, ‘Locating Listening’, in *Ethical Responsiveness and the Politics of Difference*, ed. Tanja Dreher and Anshuman Mondal (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 22.

discourse, whether through systemically patterned choices or through the institutionalisation of structural injustices, justice is not possible.

It is undoubtedly the case that systemic level silencing is a feature of society, and not an easy one to rectify. A theory of listening, if it is to be helpful, should address what can be expected of the individual listener by way of virtuous listening when systemic injustice prevails. Further, the theory should articulate what the individual listener *can* do to avoid silencing people under such conditions or even to push back against the conditions themselves, and whether the individual listener's pursuit of virtue can have any salutary effect on the state of public discourse.¹⁵⁰ That is the purpose of this chapter, and to address these questions we need a principled way of thinking about how individual conversational behaviours and shared patterns of conversational behaviour—the social context of discourse, including its resources and injustices—relate to, respond to, and alter each other. I offer the Discourse Ecology Model here to facilitate and give structure to this way of thinking.

We need more than just a lens, however, to see what we are aiming to see. We also need to know where to point that lens if we are to see what it is meant to show us. To see the ecosystem dynamics at work, a simplified, fictionalised narrative context is given. Imagine a society that consists of two social groups; we will call them the green people and the blue people.¹⁵¹ Historically, the greens have

¹⁵⁰ There is a way to ask this question which looks at what the disempowered can do to unsettle such systems from within their disempowered role, and this would include some creative approaches to listening past and listening to undermine oppressors. Accounts of this kind of resistance can be found, to name just two, in James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New rev. ed., Penguin Books (London: Penguin Books, 1996). I am interested here in what kinds of responsibility can be taken up by a listener in a position of comparative socio-political dominance—how Jimmy can push back against systemic injustices, not how Gina might fight these herself.

¹⁵¹ The use of colour identifiers here serves to simplify reference in the example whilst abstracting away from the types of injustice the example could illustrate. I recognise that the use of colour terms suggests that this is a distinction of race, and indeed I had race relations in mind as I formulated some parts of the example—but I also consider the example to be potentially applicable to a myriad of differences, including gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, linguistic variation, and so on.

oppressed the blues, and though officially the two groups are now on equal footing, legacies of injustice remain, and the blues are still marginalised. Jimmy Green is the superintendent of a public school district, and he dreams of running for mayor one day. This week, he has a scheduled meeting with Gina Blue, the spokesperson for a network of blue parents advocating for better support for blue students in the school district.

In previous years, Jimmy has not had a great relationship with Gina and her group; Gina's persistence as a concerned and often critical voice did not make her one of Jimmy's favourite people. When meeting with Gina, Jimmy has a bad habit of slipping over into what Rachel McKinney calls *conversational uncooperativity*.¹⁵² Lately, however, as Jimmy seeks to grow personally and to improve his standing in the community to support his future hopes, he has come to realise that if he wants to stand a chance at getting votes from the families in his area, he will need to have a substantiated reputation as 'someone who listens' to the blues. Unless people feel that he has genuinely earned such a reputation, he is unlikely to get much of the blue vote, and even less likely to influence the wider green community to take steps to rectify their legacies of injustice. If he wants to achieve his dream, something has to change, starting now, in his relationship with the blues.

He plans to begin by listening—*really listening*—to Gina at the meeting this week. How does he go about changing his listening habits? According to Chapter 3, Jimmy needs to change his policy of responsiveness to Gina so that his perception of her changes, in order that he not block her voice from having a chance to persuade him via his central route processing. According to Medina's claims discussed in Chapter 1, Jimmy needs to become alert and sensitized to the 'silenced' voices of the blues, and find a way listen to them in the face of society-wide patterns.

¹⁵² McKinney, 'Communication, Labor, and Communicative Labor', 69.

Exactly how he would make these changes is the question at hand. A somewhat more concrete explanation in the terms from Chapter 2 would say Jimmy has to notice when he—whether by personal choice, systemic habitus, or both—withholds uptake in bad faith. He needs to notice that when Gina says something that he does not want to hear, by habit he takes the relevant interpretive option off the table. Once he learns to catch himself doing so, he is faced with the task of resisting this habit; he will need courage and humility—particularly at first—as he starts giving uptake to whatever it is Gina has to say. We will keep our focus in this chapter on the way Jimmy’s motivations and intentions are at play, and in light of these, see what he should certainly avoid doing if he indeed intends to be a good listener. If Jimmy is a well-integrated virtuous subject, then the switch in motivation may be sufficient to start him on the path to change,¹⁵³ but if he wants a linguistically and conversationally concrete account of the infra-doings which one uses to accomplish listening, he would find those in Chapters 5 and 6.

Let us suppose the motivation-led change in behaviour will be possible for Jimmy to accomplish—not all at once, but beginning this week; this course of change will continue with much practice, correction, and more practice in the months ahead. For purposes of illustration, I am stipulating that Gina is an exceptionally adept communicator, not difficult to understand. Gina is thoughtful and well-informed, great at her job, and a credible witness. Compared to Jimmy, she has considerable expertise regarding issues of welfare in the blue community. Jimmy is, in general, also thoughtful and well-informed, great at his job, and genuinely concerned about the welfare of his students. He is not one of those administrators known for caring more about district prestige and test scores than for the needs of his students. Jimmy is passionate about education and as a member of a different (non-intersecting) marginalised community, he knows what it is like to be marginalized and silenced. Perhaps this is why he can be so touchy about Gina’s claims that he has not sufficiently addressed the needs of blue students and families in the district.

¹⁵³ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 137.

In Section 1, we have an overview of the listening habits Jimmy wants to move away from. Since at this point we are focusing on Jimmy's motivation for change, we want to get a sense of what the Old Jimmy might look like, and for ample contrast, other ways that vices of poor listening can show up. Joining the patterns from Chapter 2 (silencing, gaslighting, and refusing to listen) are problematic patterns which I call 'epistemic whack-a-mole',¹⁵⁴ playing the Inquisitor (as opposed to the inquisitive Critic), and excommunication.

Section 2 follows Jimmy's motivational shift to the new posture of seeking to listen. We get a sense of the contextual features he is up against in his socio-political environment. For a comparison case of what *to do*, we look at a situation where Jimmy does listen well, to serve as a rough template for him to follow in seeking to change his behaviour.

In Section 3 the Discourse Ecology Model is introduced. I explicate the *ecosystem* frame we will be using and seed it with some concrete examples of linguistic change, so that we can see how the dynamics of individual and social habit play out in the context of the discursive environment. We have stipulated that Jimmy will be successful in slowly changing his habits until he becomes someone who really listens to the blues. Our aim is to see how Jimmy's personal habit change has an effect on the wider ecosystem—how it spreads and, in theory, could become institutionalised as a new standard habitus of his community.

Section 4 looks at how Jimmy's own behavioural change can produce a local motivational complex (consisting of a 'prompt' for others attention to shift and a 'drive' for them to alter their behaviour). Section 5 looks at how the change introduced by Jimmy at the local level can spread to the point where the change becomes institutionalised as a collective social habit which shapes the behaviour of the community as a whole.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Named for the classic carnival game in which motorised 'moles' pop up through various holes in the games surface, and the player attempts to whack each mole down with a mallet before the mole disappears.

¹⁵⁵ Much of the content and arguments in Sections 3 and following first appeared in Susan E Notess, 'The Discourse Ecology Model: Changing the World One Habit at a Time', in *Rethinking Habit*, ed. Jeremy

1. Old Jimmy, and other vicious ghosts

We begin by taking a look at the old policy of responsiveness which Jimmy is moving away from. When he sees Gina's name up next on his schedule, he feels himself switching into a defensive mode, anticipating the critiques he is not keen to hear from her. He braces, ready to poke holes in her claims, to cross-examine her, and to discredit her. Conversational uncooperativity takes various forms; McKinney's taxonomy includes what she calls 'willful obtuseness, affected misunderstanding, undue skepticism, bad listening, ignoring, and intrusive interruption',¹⁵⁶ as well as 'pedantic literalism'.¹⁵⁷ The first two, wilful obtuseness and affected misunderstanding, closely resemble the refusal of uptake detailed in Chapter 2. Undue scepticism is a form of testimonial injustice.¹⁵⁸ What Jimmy defaults to is a form of bad listening which I call the *Inquisitor* mode. The Inquisitor questions everything he hears, but we should distinguish the Inquisitor from the curious, inquisitive Critic, asking questions to explore and understand. The Inquisitor is on a mission to expose every possible falsehood and flaw and to keep opposing voices from gaining influence in the community. As a rule, Jimmy is not given to approaching people as the Inquisitor, and it is noteworthy that Gina taps such a nerve in him that he turns into the Inquisitor when he meets with her.

The Inquisitor's approach to questioning is aimed at filtering out voices which do not merit full attention and engagement. The Inquisitor is not unique in this. Such filtering is standard behaviour, used, for example, when we identify junk mail which need not be opened or, more aptly, email with concerns best directed to someone else, which need only be forwarded on;¹⁵⁹ Jimmy uses a similar

Dunham and Komarine Romdenh-Romluc (Routledge, Forthcoming). The content is included with permission.

¹⁵⁶ McKinney, 'Communication, Labor, and Communicative Labor', 70.

¹⁵⁷ McKinney, 74–78.

¹⁵⁸ Specifically, attributing the speaker with a 'credibility deficit'; see Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 17–29.

¹⁵⁹ The junk mail case differs from the redirection case in that the former takes it to be the case that minimal, peripheral attention (i.e., a mere glance at the envelope) is sufficient to adequately process the matter. The redirection case uses peripheral attention to determine that for maximum efficiency, the matter is best passed on to someone else and not engaged with on a deeper level by oneself. In this point I am applying to

heuristic when a parent comes to speak to him, aggrieved about a student's lower-than-anticipated marks. These are matters for classroom teachers, and he trusts his staff to do their jobs well. He lets the parent express their frustration, then redirects them to the child's teacher. He does not particularly absorb or process the content of or reason for the complaint; the matter does not merit *his* close attention.

Jimmy's trouble with Gina is that she comes bearing district-level concerns which are in fact within his remit, and as a skilful communicator, Gina easily bypasses Jimmy's heuristic for dismissal of grievances that are not his business. Gina makes him pay attention, but he does not want to acknowledge the things that she has to say. Because of Gina's position in the blue parents' network, he cannot avoid meeting with her altogether. So Jimmy the Inquisitor aims to discredit Gina on the basis of the content of her claims, relentlessly questioning whatever she says, to stop her utterances getting through his filter.

Recall from the discussion in Chapter 1 that all speech involves responding to and altering the normative context. If Jimmy promises Gina something, then she has an entitlement to expect that thing from him, and he has an obligation to do accordingly. If Gina lodges a complaint with Jimmy, then it creates an obligation for him to answer her complaint, on pains of rudeness and dereliction of his professional duties. He need not answer her complaint in any particular way, but he is obliged to address it and to respond accordingly.¹⁶⁰ Jimmy the Inquisitor's urge to filter out and question everything Gina says arises from a wish to stop her from being able to make any changes to the normative context which

non-persuasion cases the difference in approaches to processing persuasive messages discussed in the ELM literature referred to in Chapter 3; see Lange, Kruglanski, and Higgins, *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, 231.

¹⁶⁰ For full treatment of the normativity and possibilities surrounding complaint, see Sara N. Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Durham: Duke University Press, Forthcoming). Cf. Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen, 'Exploring Affiliation in the Reception of Conversational Complaint Stories', in *Emotion in Interaction*, ed. Anssi Perakyla and Marja-Leena Sorjonen (Oxford University Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199730735.001.0001>.

would place Jimmy under obligations he does not welcome. Whilst Jimmy is unlikely to think in exactly these terms, the visceral reaction of hostile avoidance should be familiar, and we can gloss it aptly in this way.

The Inquisitor has a few strategies. One is to refuse to give uptake to unwelcome utterances so as to avoid having to respond to them, as discussed in Chapter 2. Refusal to listen aims to achieve silencing on a granular level, filtering out specific utterances from even requiring any response or engagement as such, by withholding uptake. These old standby methods of pretending she is joking or otherwise miscategorising Gina's illocution do not tend to work well between these two people; Gina is a very deliberate communicator, and Jimmy prefers not to stoop to such tricks. He deflects her with peripherally processed responses and dismissals when he can, but mostly he has to take her utterances through central route processing, recognise her illocutionary and perlocutionary aims, and respond to them. So we will look here at two further strategies of the Inquisitor: epistemic whack-a-mole, which is what Jimmy tends to use, and a darker, more severe strategy of excommunication.

Epistemic Whack-A-Mole

What the Inquisitor does here is a familiar strategy: each of the speaker's utterances gets isolated out from the context, treated in the most literal terms as a declarative assertion which can be true or not. In technical terms, the Inquisitor can be described here as deploying the Declarative Fallacy to keep all of a speaker's utterances in a strict declarative realm¹⁶¹ and to obscure the normative implications of what people say. Further, the Inquisitor's quick isolation of each particular utterance from the broader context of what someone is saying can be likened to an imposing of a stark form of a Message in a Bottle frame. The Inquisitor can then show each individual assertion to be untrue in a quick game of epistemic whack-a-mole, 'whacking' each assertion down as it comes through

¹⁶¹ See Belnap, 'Declaratives Are Not Enough'.

with disagreement, counter-claims, and criticism, and on occasion by performing what Matthew Cull calls ‘dismissive incomprehension’.¹⁶²

This works to Jimmy’s advantage in two immediate ways. One, it makes Gina have to work much harder to communicate her points, because Jimmy is not letting her build connections between her points and situate them in appropriate interpretive contexts. As Rachel McKinney puts it, conversational uncooperativity represents ‘failures to treat one’s interlocutors as interlocutors — as the sort of people who make claims against one’s attention, participation, understanding, coordination, and accommodation, and as the sorts of people who deserve one’s time, energy, and effort toward such activity.’¹⁶³ Two, it allows Jimmy to pose as the rational one in the conversation, as if he is critically examining every point, doing epistemic due diligence, and not being taken in by silly claims or overly motivated rhetoric—a flattering role for him to play.

Beyond the immediate experience of the conversation, however, this tactic has a more directed purpose, and that is to avoid *normative entanglement*. I use the term *normative entanglement* to describe being subject to the normative changes enacted by what an interlocutor says. Return again to the idea that if I make a promise, then I incur an obligation to follow through, and the promisee incurs an entitlement to hold me accountable. In the terminology of Kukla and Lance, the normative incursions of an utterance can be agent-neutral or agent-relative, with respect to both input and output.¹⁶⁴ So for example, a promise is generally not agent-neutral with respect to input or output: it is I who promises, so the obligation attaches to me specifically; no one else is made accountable by my act of promising. My promise also entails that I have the entitlement to make the

¹⁶² ‘Dismissive Incomprehension is the act of displaying one’s incomprehension (or pretending to be ignorant) of the meaning of some other agent’s speech, in order to dismiss that speech and the agent who made that speech.’ Matthew J Cull, ‘Dismissive Incomprehension: A Use of Purported Ignorance to Undermine Others’, *Social Epistemology* 33, no. 3 (4 May 2019): 263, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2019.1625982>.

¹⁶³ McKinney, ‘Communication, Labor, and Communicative Labor’, 94.

¹⁶⁴ Kukla and Lance, ‘Yo!’ and ‘Lo!’ , 19.

promise in question. If I do not have the authority to grant legal pardons, for example, then I cannot rightly promise a legal pardon. Promising has agent-relative input in that it depends on the promising agent's entitlements and generates an obligation *for that agent*. Promising also has agent-relative output in that it generates an entitlement for the addressee in particular. This contrasts with assertions in an important way. An assertion makes a claim which, by its structure, licenses anyone who hears it to form the relevant belief. If I say that I like chocolate, and an eavesdropper overhears, then the eavesdropper is no less justified than the addressee in believing that I said that I like chocolate.

There are hosts of details here that I am skimming over about how even plain declarative assertions can modify the normative context, but the relevant point is this: declaratives do not generate the same kinds of *agent-relative* obligations and entitlements as other kinds of utterances. If Gina makes a declarative statement about the state of things in the school district, and Jimmy the Inquisitor can demonstrate her statement to be false, then presumably no normative changes are enacted. But if Gina makes another kind of utterance (say, an indictment), then her utterance generates agent-relative normative changes: she generates an obligation for Jimmy either to respond to the indictment or else to stand as indicted. These normative changes attach to Jimmy specifically, and they restrict the options that he has for (justified) response. This point tracks the same idea as Elizabeth Camp's claim that metaphors make good insults, because even if the declarative content of the insult is demonstrated to be false, the unflattering metaphor still makes us complicit in whatever normative judgements it implies, unless the metaphor itself can be reconstructed and diffused.¹⁶⁵

On the other hand, if what Gina says fundamentally is just a declarative statement, and if Jimmy is quite sure her statement is false and can additionally demonstrate to Gina that her statement is false, then no new normative obligations would attach to him on the basis of her statement. For her claims to

¹⁶⁵ Elisabeth Camp, 'Why Metaphors Make Good Insults: Perspectives, Presupposition, and Pragmatics', *Philosophical Studies* 174, no. 1 (January 2017): 47–64, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-015-0525-y>.

generate any obligations for him, on the model of the Declarative Fallacy, he would first need to accept her claims as valid. Thus, when the Inquisitor takes up the epistemic whack-a-mole tactic, he shields himself from incurring obligations by pretending that all of Gina's utterances are false declaratives. I do not mean to say that this strategy is necessarily very convincing; often it is not. But it can be successful in avoiding normative entanglement.

To illustrate this tactic at work, I offer a non-fictional scenario. A friend recently described an instance of epistemic whack-a-mole being used by the director of her PhD programme. She, a student representative, approached him with an assessment of the need for more of certain kinds of support for PhD students, highlighting a variety of ways that support was lacking and pointing to an overall pattern in the programme structure. She described the meeting this way: 'Every piece that I said was waved away before I could connect it to the others. I said, "We need more opportunities for students to teach." He said, "Teaching opportunities are available for every student who requests to teach; in fact, you are teaching." I said, "The pay scale for PhD students who teach does not realistically reflect the work we put in." He said, "We just re-negotiated pay raises with the students last year." And so on.'¹⁶⁶

Every attempt she made to introduce a normative claim, that something ought to be done or changed or improved, was met with a claim that she was incorrect. She communicated the students' requested for *more* opportunities than what they have, and the director replied that they were incorrect about not having opportunities. Looking at this conversation from the outside, we can see where the slippage is introduced by the director who, in his role as Inquisitor, either myopically or disingenuously seems to convert every normative claim into a false assertion that he can then bat away, and therefore avoid being caught up in any of the obligations the students are asking him to acknowledge and answer. The

¹⁶⁶ Personal communication.

avoidance strategy responds to a feature of what it is to pay attention to a problem or concern. Springer notes:

Attention in this practical sense is poised to shift; something is going wrong if attention does not issue in some kind of change and transformation. Paying attention is more like following a butterfly than sitting still.¹⁶⁷

The Inquisitor who prefers to keep his seat rather than be open to change aims to convince himself and others that there is no real concern here that needs attending to.

When the Inquisitor says, *truthfully*, ‘We offer teaching opportunities for our students; in fact, you are teaching,’ he supplies this claim as evidence to contradict the claim that there is a lack of teaching opportunity for students. She says, ‘We lack opportunities.’ He says, ‘You have opportunities.’ Claim defeated. This reaction is facilitated by the way the Inquisitor, when playing epistemic whack-a-mole, keeps each utterance isolated from its context. The students’ complaint about availability of teaching opportunities was intended to be connected to those that followed, regarding the pay scale, which was also affecting the extent to which students were finding the available teaching opportunities to be sufficient for their needs. Keeping each claim isolated from its rightful connection with the wider picture allows the Inquisitor to keep operating strictly in the ‘realm of facts’: an illusory realm in which he can easily dismiss claims by showing some ‘factual reason’ why the claims are not epistemically correct. This way he does not need to do any legwork of proving that the students do in fact have sufficient teaching income for their needs—proof which would be difficult to establish even if it were correct, and moreover is unlikely to be correct.

This tactic is surely as enraging to the philosopher of language as it is to anyone subjected to it; that is not how speech acts work! But as we have said of the refuser in Chapter 2, the Inquisitor is also not acting in good faith. The Inquisitor treats the utterances of others *as if* they were disconnected from their context, as

¹⁶⁷ Springer, *Communicating Moral Concern*, 84–85.

if they were disguised declaratives which can easily be shown to be inaccurate. If Jimmy the Inquisitor engages this mode with conviction, he makes it very difficult for Gina to get her message across, making her look inaccurate and perhaps even sloppy.

Excommunication

Now, Gina Blue is, as we have said, a gifted communicator. She has encountered this Inquisitor strategy before and can navigate around it, cornering Jimmy into giving her the floor long enough to hear her various claims in their context and to make the normative implications explicit. If Jimmy the Inquisitor gets really upset and forgets his own moral commitments, he might reach for the stronger tactic of excommunication. As gaslighting is a stronger, more motivated, and more purposeful use of refusal to listen, excommunication is a stronger, more motivated, and more purposeful use of epistemic whack-a-mole. Similar in function to gaslighting, this tactic is meant to disqualify the legitimacy of the interlocutor to make claims in the first place—to undermine her standing as a ‘deliberator and moral agent’.¹⁶⁸ Jimmy says, as gently as he can, ‘Look Gina, it sounds to me like you’ve gone mama bear, and I appreciate that. You love your kids, you love the students, and you want the best for them. We are fortunate to have protective mothers like you in our district. But we don’t want our mama bears to run away with the facts.’¹⁶⁹

I call this strategy *excommunication* because it works by removing the (illocutionarily) disabling her and labelling her as someone who does not constitute a standpoint from which rational discursive claims can be made, or in Tanesini’s terms, whose intentions cannot be recognised because her utterances

¹⁶⁸ Kate Abramson, ‘Turning up the Lights on Gaslighting’, *Philosophical Perspectives* 28, no. 1 (n.d.): 8–10, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpe.12046>.

¹⁶⁹ For a non-fictional example of this type of move being used, see Alessandra Tanesini, ‘“Calm Down, Dear”: Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing and Ignorance’, *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 90, no. 1 (June 2016): 71–92, <https://doi.org/10.1093/arisup/akw011>. Tanesini examines the features of virtue and vice which factor into an agent making use of this kind of move.

do not pass muster as assertions.¹⁷⁰ If successful, the disabling of the Target results in her being removed from her standing in the moral community—thereby rendering her, or in any case, treating her as if she is someone whose claims cannot generate the kinds of normative entanglements described above. The Inquisitor does this by categorising Gina’s utterances as being of a fundamentally different kind from those of rational conversation. Whereas Jimmy’s and others’ utterances involve nice, sound things like facts, reasons, declaratives, and truth, Gina’s utterances are reactionary, affective, and not based in human rationality but in the respectable sort of instinctual self-interests of any animal mother protecting her young.

By recategorising Gina’s utterances in this way, the Inquisitor indicates that she has ceased to participate in the activity of rational discourse. Her mama-bear outcry is part of a different game altogether than that of rational discourse, and as such, the sort of normative changes brought about by discursive moves do not obtain. She cannot indict him, generating an obligation for him either to respond or to stand indicted, if she is not ‘playing by the rules’ of the game of rational discourse in the first place. In its strongest and darkest forms, excommunication amounts to a claim that the Target is not a *rational person* who is *saying* things for (intentional) *reasons*, but is an *animal body* making *noises* because of nonrational *causes* like fear or hunger. Like gaslighting, this claim is morally problematic because of the constitutive moral damage it causes to the Target, triggering fragmentation and, especially in this case, depersonalisation of the subject in her mind, in Jimmy’s, and in the minds of the wider discursive community. The Inquisitor is here, as above, acting in bad faith: a second similarity with the Gaslighter.

A third similarity is that both tactics rely on unrealistic pictures of how rationality works. The distinction above between a person saying things for reasons and an animal body making noises, like the Crazy Claim in Chapter 2, assumes a dichotomy between rational and non-rational acting—a distinction

¹⁷⁰ Tanesini, 71–72.

which surely does not pose a clear-cut dichotomy, and which surely does not merit wholesale judgements of the subject rather than the incident. Hangry Joe may be speaking as an animal body making noises that are caused more by his hunger than by propositional mental attitudes he endorses as a rational agent, but this does not in any way entail that Joe himself is not a rational agent who should be removed from his deliberative and moral standing in the community!

Happily, let us say Jimmy has enough courage and humility not to follow the Inquisitor mode into such depths as deploying the excommunication tactic. Moreover, he has this new resolution to overcome his old habits and become someone who listens to blue voices, beginning with listening to Gina this week. We turn now to the motivational shift which is the starting point for this change.

2. New Jimmy

Jimmy's resolution to change his policy of responsiveness to Gina means that he needs to break the habit of approaching Gina in the Inquisitor mode. He wants to become someone who listens to the blues, so he needs to approach Gina in a Listener mode. He knows straightaway that the Listener should not resort to tactics such as refusing uptake, playing epistemic whack-a-mole, gaslighting, or excommunicating Gina. So what does Jimmy the listener do? Not having the theoretical framework we are developing here, Jimmy reaches for a template. He should listen to Gina the same way he listens to someone he would always listen to—the way he would listen to a trusted and respected leader in the green community, for example.

We should note that the situation facing Jimmy Green and Gina Blue this week is that they are participants in a discourse setting in which, due to the history of oppression of the blues, it can be difficult for blues' claims to be fairly heard by greens, due to the effects of vicious peripheral processing (see Chapter 3) that incorporates implicit bias.¹⁷¹ In addition to the purposeful tactics used by Jimmy

¹⁷¹ See Michael Brownstein and Jennifer Mather Saul, eds., *Implicit Bias and Philosophy*, First edition (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016); Jules Holroyd, 'Implicit Bias, Awareness and Imperfect Cognitions', *Consciousness and Cognition* 33 (May 2015): 511–23, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2014.08.024>;

in the Inquisitor mode, he has found that all he can think about when Gina speaks is her voice. It sounds grating and shrill. He is distracted by her eyebrow and the set of her jaw; they strike him as impudent. These perceptual effects of implicit bias will take time and practice to overcome. The more time Jimmy spends in the Listener mode, his perception will become more rightly attuned (as is standard when acquiring a virtue), and he will no longer need to practice so purposefully to overcome prejudiced perceptions.¹⁷²

Jimmy cannot merely wait around for Gina to just happen to seem more amenable to him; he needs a way to actively practice a new pattern. The simplest strategy is to reverse the assumptions behind the Inquisitor's tactics. Instead of playing epistemic whack-a-mole, he should seek to listen to her.¹⁷³ This means that instead of isolating each of Gina's statements from their context, he should give her the floor space to expost the full context of her claims. And instead of privileging declaratives, which do not generate such explicit agent-relative normative shifts and even so are easily defeated by counter-claims, he should attend to the normative implications of any utterance Gina makes. His aim is to listen to her, and that means being willing to notice and acknowledge the way that her utterances generate obligations for him.

Likewise, as he seeks to listen to Gina, he should avoid the temptations of excommunication. That means instead of faulting Gina's claims as failing to be part of rational discourse and therefore recategorising them, Jimmy the Listener commits himself to the *prima facie* validity of Gina's claims as rational discourse moves. This follows from committing to Gina's status as a rational being with

Katherine Puddifoot, 'Dissolving the Epistemic/Ethical Dilemma over Implicit Bias', *Philosophical Explorations* 20, no. sup1 (24 March 2017): 73–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2017.1287295>.

¹⁷² Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 16–17,

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199228782.001.0001>; Nancy Snow, 'Virtue Acquisition: The Paradox of Striving', *Journal of Moral Education* 45, no. 2 (2 April 2016): 179–91,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2016.1181617>.

¹⁷³ That is to say, listening is in contrast with the game of epistemic whack-a-mole, and the contrast is easily enough seen in Jimmy's shift in motivation. The interesting and challenging question is how he makes that happen, and we come to that matter shortly.

standing to make normative claims on him. By committing to Gina's status as a participant of rational discourse, he shifts onto himself the burden of figuring out how her utterances constitute valid discursive moves—that is, he needs to do his share of the work in the conversation, beginning with putting effort into his interpretive labour.¹⁷⁴ If he assumes that her moves are valid, but does not see the basis for an utterance, then the burden is on him to hunt for the missing pieces needed to make sense of why her utterance is valid. In our terms, Jimmy needs to be as reluctant to excommunicate Gina as he would be to excommunicate someone he especially trusts.

Suppose Jimmy recently went to a convention for school districts that provide outstanding science education. That year the convention managed to get Stephen Hawking as a keynote speaker. Jimmy listened to Hawking's talk with interest, although as an administrator rather than a scientist he did not really follow all the theoretical details. Hawking stressed that certain subjects and skills are of more critical importance than others for young students to learn. Jimmy trusts that Hawking has reasons for saying these things, even though at no point did he manage to pin down what those reasons were amidst the scientific jargon. Later, at the hotel bar, Jimmy encountered Hawking and some others from the conference talking about which films of the past year were the best. Jimmy heard and noted Hawking's recommendations. That night, in his hotel room, he watched Hawking's favourite film, because he takes Hawking's word for it that this is a good film.

Of course, Jimmy trusted Hawking to have reasons for his claims about science education because Hawking is a renowned scientific expert. Hawking is not, however, an expert film critic. And yet, because Jimmy trusts Hawking to be a rational discourse participant who generally has reasons for the things he says, Jimmy assumed that Hawking has reasons—valid and intelligible, even if not necessarily widely shared—for his film recommendation. Jimmy has no doubt that if there had been time to ask Hawking the reasons for his recommendations, and

¹⁷⁴ McKinney, 'Communication, Labor, and Communicative Labor', 94.

to ask further questions about why Hawking's tastes are as they are, the reasons would have been present, valid, and more or less intelligible. Even if some of Hawking's tastes are far from what Jimmy can make sense of due to their personal differences, Jimmy is extraordinarily unlikely to interpret this as evidence that Hawking is violating the norms of rational discourse or in some fundamental way lacking in rationality.

As Jimmy awaits Gina's arrival, he mutters to himself: 'Trust her like you trusted Hawking. Even if you do not get what she is on about or why she sees things as she does, *assume* that she has reasons, and that her reasons are good reasons, whether you make sense of them or not. And if you could not understand Hawking's reasons for his claims you would wish for more time with him to learn more. Likewise, if you do not understand Gina's reasons for her claims, then keep listening. Maybe next week you will understand a little bit more...'

This account of how Jimmy changes his policy of responsiveness to Gina is simplistic, but it is a beginning nonetheless. We will now leave Jimmy to take a crack at really listening to Gina this week; let us say he does passably well but it takes several such meetings before his new habits are established. As he improves through practice, he finds his associations changing. He no longer perceives the set of her jaw as insolent or her voice as shrill. The more he grows to understand the context of Gina's claims and the validity of her point of view, the more resources he has for understanding the situation of blue families in his district.

The changes in his perception of Gina begin to generalise so that when meeting blue people in general, Jimmy is less inclined to interpret them as hostile or threatening, as shrill or insolent, or as animal bodies (mama bears) rather than discourse participants. Somewhere between the contextualised events of listening to the interlocutor in front of him and the general pattern of his responsiveness to blue persons as discourse participants, Jimmy becomes someone who truly listens to blue voices. It is beyond the remit of my project to give a substantive account of this change from a lived experience of implicit bias and prejudice to one which is

more just.¹⁷⁵ I am stipulating that this result occurs so that we can skip ahead to the next stage of Jimmy's project.

3. The Discourse Ecology Model

Recall that Jimmy Green's hope was that becoming someone who listens to blue voices would have bearing not only on his chances of being mayor, but also on the community-wide discourse situation. The greens don't listen to the blues. Perhaps if Jimmy were to someday be a mayor who listens to the blues, then he could enact policies that are more responsive to the interests of the blues in his community. Even so, it would still be the case that the greens in general don't listen to the blues in general. What might it look like for Jimmy's personal listening habits to generalise across the community, regardless of whether he holds public office, so that the greens in general start listening to the blues? Is it even possible for one individual's change in habit to change a community, or is this a naïve thing to hope for?

We will proceed in three steps. First, we need a usable account of discursive behaviour across a community, for which I put forward my Discourse Ecology Model. Then, we need to understand how changes occur in discourse ecologies, which we can find through analogy with an established, well analysed, and not morally contentious parallel: namely, the linguistic change processes behind lexicalisation. Finally, we can draw inferences about how a change in Jimmy's behaviour could trigger a shift in his discursive ecology by translating the mechanisms of linguistic shift into the conceptual framework of the Discourse Ecology Model.

In the Rocky Mountains where I grew up, people flock to Rocky Mountain National Park each autumn to watch the herds of elk who have come down into the wide, flat glacial valleys, called moraines, to mate. As children we would compete to see who would be the first to spot a herd grazing in the valley. It was easier to

¹⁷⁵ That question belongs to its own theoretical discourse, and has been explored in, for example, Helen Ngo, *The Habits of Racism: A Phenomenology of Racism and Racialized Embodiment* (Lanham, London: Lexington Books, 2019).

win if you knew that elk like to graze on willow bushes, so by looking for areas with dense growth of willows, one could more easily find a herd of elk. The willows, in turn, grow in riparian areas where beavers are active. The beavers make use of willow for food and for building dams. Whilst these three species have evolved to support compatibility and flourishing in competition, the last century has brought many changes to the area through human involvement. Park management are actively involved in supporting each of the respective species to flourish such that they remain in balance, supporting each other to thrive rather than posing a threat to each other. The aim of this adaptive management programme¹⁷⁶ is to stabilise the riparian ecosystem for the welfare of willow, elk, and beaver. This description, informal as it is, suffices to show the relevant features of the conceptual frame we need: that of the *ecosystem*.

Ecosystems are comprised of all the species and features that interact with each other in an area. The beavers, the willows, the elk, the river, and many others comprise the moraine ecosystem. The ecosystem affects and to some extent determines the behaviour of its constituents. This captures something very like language, and very like discourse communities: they are constituted by individuals whose behaviour is structured by the system they jointly constitute. The behaviour of individuals both structures the system and is structured by it. It is useful to view a discourse community as a kind of ecosystem, in which the linguistic resources, social structures, cultural values, and epistemic backdrop of the community structure the discursive behaviour of the individuals comprising the community. These structures, in turn, are structured by the heritage and creativity of the individuals comprising it. When individuals use these resources to participate in the discourse in novel ways, these novelties alter the resources available—creating

¹⁷⁶ For details, see the Monitoring Plan currently in force for the National Park in Linda C. Zeigenfuss, Therese Johnson, and Zachary Wiebe, 'Monitoring Plan for Vegetation Responses to Elk Management in Rocky Mountain National Park' (U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2011-1013, 24 July 2011), <https://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2011/1013/>. Further details can be found on the National Park website; see National Park Service, 'References and Glossary - Rocky Mountain National Park (U.S. National Park Service)', 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/romo/learn/management/references-and-glossary.htm>.

new possibilities, revising the epistemic backdrop, and shifting the cultural norms. The participants of a discourse both structure and are structured by the ecology of the discourse.

Linguists have long been fascinated by the way language holds in tension the restrictiveness of its structures and inventories, on the one hand, with its infinite possibility for producing novel forms on the other. Historical linguistics studies the way novel utterances become institutionalised—that is, become stable and widespread recognised forms across a linguistic community.¹⁷⁷ Novel words that become institutionalised are called neologisms.¹⁷⁸ This is arguably one of the more straightforward forms of language change, and we can thank Shakespeare (*multitudinous*, *dwindle*), Milton (*sensuous*, *oblivious*), Spenser (*blatant*, *askance*), and Carroll (*chortle*) for contributing many words to English through this process.¹⁷⁹ One person uses a word that is new, constructed out of familiar roots, stems, and morphemes, or out of onomatopoeic syllables. Others encounter this novel usage, find they can make sense of what it means, have a use or need for it, and so begin using it. Eventually enough people know and are using the word that it becomes a part of the language, found in dictionaries. Thus, an individual's novel behaviour becomes institutionalised across the linguistic community.

Jimmy Green wants to know whether it is possible for his novel behaviour (listening to Gina Blue) to become institutionalised so that his whole community listens to blue voices. For that to happen, it would need to be possible for an individual's novel discursive behaviour to shift the structure of the discursive ecology, such that the discourse participants in general become structured by the ecology in such a way as to be motivated to listen to the blues. Is this possible? Yes. It is possible in theory for Jimmy to coin a novel word which then becomes

¹⁷⁷ Laurel J. Brinton and Elizabeth Closs Traugott, *Lexicalization and Language Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511615962>.

¹⁷⁸ Hadumod Bussmann, *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, ed. Gregory Trauth and Kerstin Kazzazi (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), s.v. neologism; P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), s.v. neologism.

¹⁷⁹ Brinton and Traugott, *Lexicalization and Language Change*, 44.

institutionalised in the discourse. If he were a veritable Milton¹⁸⁰ he could create novel forms which vividly change the discourse ecology by furnishing it with rich new communicative resources. We know this *can* happen because it happens all the time—not on Milton’s or Shakespeare’s scale, but new words are getting added to our dictionaries every year, especially with rapid technical innovation, the playfulness of internet discourse, and the scope of globalisation. Therefore, at least conceptually, we know that individual discursive behaviour can shift a discourse ecology. What we want is a way to see how Jimmy’s discursive behaviour can prompt other greens to change their policies of responsiveness to blue voices.

Consider what it would look like for an individual’s habit of listening to blue voices to change the discourse ecology in regard to blues being listened to. First, we should note an important feature of how this kind of change differs from the kind of linguistic change referred to above. When a new word comes into being, an artifact of language is created, a thing which can be copied, referred to, written down, and glossed. Lexicalisations (new words) can occur swiftly and fairly frequently, but other types of language changes occur. Grammaticalisation refers to changes in grammatical structures used by language speakers; they are slower and occur less frequently, but once a grammaticalisation shift has happened it tends to be persistent. A common example is the shift in English by which a verb of motion, *going to*, became a grammatically functional modal verb used to indicate futurity. As a specific verb of motion, we get sentences like, ‘I am going to town’, in which ‘going to’ means I am going, travelling, to some place. As a modal auxiliary, the verb might have nothing to do with going anywhere, as in, ‘Try the casserole; you are going to like it.’ The addressee is not *going* anywhere.

The grammaticalisation shift represents a new collective habit which spreads in much the same way new words spread: people hear and make sense of the new usage, and then start using it. The habit of using *going to* as a modal verb is now fully institutionalised as a part of our language system. When a new listening habit comes into being, it is not a public artifact that is created in quite

¹⁸⁰ He is not.

the same concrete way as lexicalisation. Rather, what is new is the pattern of choices a person makes in responding to people's speech: a pattern of taking the speaker seriously, with a new and more fitting policy of responsiveness. A new collective habit emerges, catches on, spreads, and takes hold. This kind of habit change may still seem far less structural than something as formal as grammatical changes, but on the ecological view, we expect factors of the socio-political context to play a role.

The social dynamics of change are perhaps most easily seen in language shifts which occur as habitual behaviour patterns not yet incorporated or accepted by the pedants who pose as guardians of linguistic integrity. One of the most iconic instances of this is the emergence of what linguists call 'discursive *like*'. The word *like* has come to have multiple new functions in the last few decades. Previously used for comparatives or to indicate tastes and enjoyment, now it is also used as a quotative introducer,¹⁸¹ a discourse marker,¹⁸² a discourse particle,¹⁸³ and approximator adverb.¹⁸⁴ These technical terms are applied to observed usages as linguists describe the grammatical patterns in how *like* is used; by applying technical labels of this kind, linguists validate linguistic innovations which many commentators are inclined to view as a corrupt intrusion infecting the language of youth.

This is just one of the myths around the uses of *like* emerging in the past forty years or so, and as Alexandra D'Arcy argues, these myths are ideologically

¹⁸¹ "And she was like, 'Oh no you don't!'"

¹⁸² "Like, I was laughing so hard I actually snorted."

¹⁸³ "He was, like, trying to pick a fight."

¹⁸⁴ "We've eaten at that place like ten times already this month; let's go somewhere else." This four-way distinction is one example of how linguists have categorised newer uses of 'like', though other analyses have also been put forward. See A. D'Arcy, 'Like and Language Ideology: Disentangling Fact from Fiction', *American Speech* 82, no. 4 (1 December 2007): 386–419, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-2007-025>; Katie Drager, 'Constructing Style: Phonetic Variation in Quotative and Discourse Particle Like', in *Discourse-Pragmatic Variation and Change in English*, ed. Heike Pichler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 232–51, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107295476.011>.

driven.¹⁸⁵ As children, many of us were urged to resist developing the ‘bad habit’ of peppering our speech with this undesirable word, lest we become ‘addicted’ to its use and find ourselves incapable of filtering it out to speak more formally when required. Hidden beneath these injunctions is a tangle of socio-political ideas—habits of interpreting the speech of some groups as less valid than others. The speech pattern as characteristic of an air-headed, teenage, Californian ‘Valley Girl’ is the mythical source of this habitual use of *like*, and the resistance to adopting the innovation is interwoven with diminishing the voices of young women. Discourse *like* is viewed as a sloppy artefact of youthful impulse. This is why the pedants resist recognising the impulse-driven innovation as linguistically valid. Dewey notes why: ‘Impulse is a source, an indispensable source, of liberation; but only as it is employed in giving habits pertinence and freshness does it liberate power.’¹⁸⁶ As we care for our language and the environment it creates for us, we may be tempted to resist letting certain utterances get added to the accreted shape of our norms, particularly the utterances of groups who are gaining increasing power to shape society through the freshness of their customs.¹⁸⁷ The case of discourse *like* is a prime example of the embeddedness of grammatical structures in socio-political environments, and it shows us that social and political shifts can, at least sometimes, spread in ways that use the same mechanisms—the same functionality of the discourse ecology—as lexicalisation and changes in who listens to whom.

Now, I noted above that our likeliness to take on the Inquisitor role depends in part on the way various social factors structure the discourse. We readily believe some kinds of claims; others we feel we need to critically evaluate before accepting. Likewise, we more readily trust some voices to be rational discourse participants saying things for good reasons, whilst we might feel led (by the structures of our discourse environment) to doubt others, unless our

¹⁸⁵ D’Arcy, ‘Like and Language Ideology’, 411–12.

¹⁸⁶ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (London: George Allen & Unwin, LTD., 1922), 105.

¹⁸⁷ This and the preceding paragraph are taken from Notess, ‘The Discourse Ecology Model’.

Inquisitors can be presented with satisfying reasons for what the speaker said. For Jimmy's commitment to the Listener role to trigger change in listening habits across the green community, his behaviour needs to alter the way the discourse environment structures the listening behaviour of others, making his trust contagious. Without changing the discourse structures, Jimmy's commitment to listening to the blues remains incidental and precarious. 'To think otherwise,' as John Dewey writes in regard to changing habits across communities, 'is to suppose that flowers can be raised in a desert or motor cars run in a jungle. Both things can happen and without a miracle. But only by first changing the jungle and desert.'¹⁸⁸

Indeed, the change Jimmy hopes to spark does not require anything miraculous. He need not aim for an *ex nihilo* creation of a new social habitus to spring up in his society. I contend that habits of listening are already present in the society, and Jimmy's aim is to trigger a society-wide broadening in scope of those habits to include the blues. Support for this hypothesis comes from many avenues. In a Habermasian view, for example, it is an unavoidable presupposition of all discourse that the interlocutor is a rational being saying things for reasons.¹⁸⁹ Jimmy aims to change an already existing discourse environment which, it follows, stands on this unavoidable presupposition of trust that there are reasons. We can therefore assume that all discourse participants already have the following habits:

H1: of taking their interlocutors to have reasons for saying what they say

H2: of engaging the Inquisitor role when suspiciously unreasonable-seeming things are said and require examination

H3: of trusting many voices to have reasons even when those reasons are not forthcoming

The entire equipment of listening is already present and deployed for all active discourse participants. H2 and H3 are the habits which give two routes to H1,

¹⁸⁸ Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, 22.

¹⁸⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2008), 58–59; see also Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2. ed (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 137.

either via trusting or examining. To get people to engage H1 more widely, taking blue interlocutors to be valid discourse participants, we would want to see people shift the way they allocate H2 and H3. Specifically, we would want to see people shift from a course of action whereby blue voices are heard with H2, to a course of action whereby blue voices are heard with H3, and possibly accompanied by the curious Inquisitor version of H2.

This H2/H3 interplay is a jargony way of restating Dewey's claim about how we might come to raise flowers in the desert:

A genuine appreciation of the beauty of flowers is not generated within a self-enclosed consciousness. It reflects a world in which beautiful flowers have already grown and been enjoyed. Taste and desire represent a prior objective fact recurring in action to secure perpetuation and extension. Desire for flowers comes after actual enjoyment of flowers.¹⁹⁰

When a new behavioural status quo arises, it grows out of previously present habits which people begin, for one reason or another, to desire to see expanded into new domains. Dewey predicates the change on a formula: precedent plus taste equals desire; precedent plus desire leads to the alteration of the objective structures of habit. 'Yet the distinctively personal or subjective factors in habit count. Taste for flowers may be the initial step in building reservoirs and irrigation canals.'¹⁹¹ Having seen and enjoyed flowers, we desire to see them blossom in the desert, so we seek to change the desert, building irrigations systems to support the cultivation of plants.

Having had the experience of being listened to and having appreciated the value of listening to others of their own groups, greens would conceivably desire to see the good of listening extended into the 'deserts' where voices are not listened to. In order to move people from pre-existing listening habits to newly broadened listening habits, Jimmy needs to spark the desire for this broadening of habits,

¹⁹⁰ Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, 22.

¹⁹¹ Dewey, 22.

which means we need an account of how Jimmy's own listening behaviour can have an effect on the public community. Susan Bickford raises this question:

...if listening is to be understood as a political rather than a private phenomenon, then it must somehow appear in the world. The physical and imaginative processes of speaking appear, of course, as spoken words. But how can listening itself be made visible or audible? How can it appear in public?¹⁹²

Put differently, if Jimmy is to spark a movement of resistance to the systemic and unjust habit of not listening to blue voices, then there needs to be some way that his acts of resistance can become *echoable*, in Medina's terms: 'that is, they acquire a repeatable significance and, therefore, they are memorable, imitable, and have the potential to lead to social change.' If Jimmy's listening behaviour can take an echoable form which others can repeat, then the repetitions may 'coalesce in such a way that they become a *traceable performative chain*, with each action in the chain having traceable effects in the subsequent actions of others.'¹⁹³ In our terms, Jimmy's behaviour should not only constitute a change in the discursive ecosystem; it should also function in some way as a signal that provokes reactions from the social networks in which Jimmy is embedded and that reverberates through the wider performative structure of shared discourse habits.¹⁹⁴

In what follows, I propose a simplified picture of the mechanisms by which Jimmy's behaviour is made public and can act as the motivational complex which activates the 'desire for flowers' amongst the green public. The motivational complex I put forward here includes two components. A *prompt* serves to trigger the observer's awareness of a discrepancy in listening habits—an awareness Medina would call 'lucidity'.¹⁹⁵ A source of *normative pressure* supplies the motivational energy that compels the observer to resolve the discrepancy—in

¹⁹² Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy*, 153.

¹⁹³ José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 225.

¹⁹⁴ Medina, 226.

¹⁹⁵ Medina, 229.

Medina's terms, a 'reverberation' which leads to individuals' increasing uptake of their forward-looking responsibilities.¹⁹⁶

We want to stay focused here on how individuals' listening behaviour can change the discourse ecology, so we do *not* have in view the exhortational aspect of motivation. Sure, Jimmy could use his platforms to call for his fellow greens to listen to blue voices, and this would provide an additional kind of prompt. If he is quite a persuasive speaker, he might even find rhetorical ways of engaging their desires sufficiently to provide the drive for change. I am not precluding the possibility of this kind of motivational complex, and in an ideal world, Jimmy might well seek to use such an approach in addition to the approach we are concerned with here. As Dewey notes, 'The stimulation of desire and effort is one preliminary in the change of surroundings. While personal exhortation, advice and instruction is a feeble stimulus compared with that which steadily proceeds from the impersonal forces and depersonalized habitudes of the environment, yet they may start the latter going.'¹⁹⁷

4. The Motivational Complex

I call this move the *I TAKE HER POINT* move. When Jimmy listens to Gina or any of the blues, the people most likely to have experience of Jimmy's listening behaviour are Jimmy and the blues in the room. But when they leave the room and Jimmy makes the claim that *I TAKE HER POINT*, he is making a claim which is incompatible with the possibility of the Inquisitor recategorising Gina's speech as noise. Rather, what we have in view is how Jimmy signals whether he *trusts* Gina to have reasons for her claims such that he can believe them to be valid (other things being equal) acts of participation in rational discourse.

For this reason, when Jimmy makes the *I TAKE HER POINT* move, he is flagging Gina as a person who *has* a point, a point which moreover Jimmy has taken up—at minimum given uptake to the illocution, although this move implies

¹⁹⁶ Medina, 227; Iris Marion Young, 'Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 23, no. 01 (7 January 2006): 123, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060043>.

¹⁹⁷ Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, 22.

further that he has taken on her point to some extent.¹⁹⁸ Suppose Jimmy were to make this move when he and Gina are addressing the district board of trustees. Many of them would be inclined, as Jimmy was previously, to approach Gina in the Inquisitor mode, more likely to disqualify her as having standing to make claims on them than to listen to what she has to say. Thus, when Jimmy flags Gina as a legitimate discourse participant with the standing to make claims on them—flagging her voice as *signal*, not as *noise*—he places a burden of answerability on the trustees.

Additionally, if the trustees have the Inquisitorial habit of embracing the Declarative Fallacy in order to disqualify and dismiss unwanted claims, they can be tripped up with the *I TAKE HER POINT* move: If Jimmy, a rational discourse participant, takes Gina to have a point, then the trustees cannot tell Jimmy why *he* is wrong unless they figure out what that point is and evaluate it. And they cannot simply excommunicate Gina now without either excommunicating Jimmy as well, or else finding some other means of discrediting and dismissing Jimmy as a discourse participant.

Thus, the prompt provided by the *I TAKE HER POINT* move shifts the burden of stance-taking responsibility onto the observer, turning the observer into a presumptive respondent. The motivational complex includes both this prompt and the drive provided by the pressure that it places on the observer to become a respondent. This pressure can be seen as taking at least three forms:

Endogenous to the discourse

When discourse occurs between two agents making utterances, they are by default taken to be broadly rational, to be saying something contentful, and to have standing to make claims on the interlocutor. As we discussed above, the

¹⁹⁸ One reviewer mentioned that we might often hear this phrase in the following way: “I take her point, but nevertheless...” In such cases, the phrase ‘I take her point’ is being used to mask that the listener has not in fact taken on the speaker’s point, but is merely raising it to dismiss it. This usage of the *I TAKE HER POINT* move is functioning disingenuously, similar in usage to a ‘figleaf’; see Jennifer M. Saul, ‘Racial Figleaves, the Shifting Boundaries of the Permissible, and the Rise of Donald Trump’, *Philosophical Topics* 45, no. 2 (2017): 97–116, <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtopics201745215>.

Inquisitor has a series of increasingly complex and laborious strategies for proving to himself and Gina that Gina is not in fact a rational discourse participant with standing to make claims on others. The *I TAKE HER POINT* move attributes Gina with explicit standing in the discourse, so that the reluctant respondent himself has to do the work of excommunicating her in order to avoid listening to her.

Exogenous to the discourse

We have a banal reflex to respond to the claims of others with competitiveness or contrariness.¹⁹⁹ When Jimmy has something controversial to say about a claim made by Gina, it is our reflex to find out what that claim is so that we can take a stance on Jimmy's stance. Even in the friendliest of cases there will be trustees on the board who enjoy outflanking Jimmy and showing him why he is mistaken. If Jimmy claims to take Gina's point, then the competitive trustee cannot play his hand until he figures out what the point is that he seeks to defeat. The *I TAKE HER POINT* move is a strategy of baiting the reluctant respondent into finding out why the claim he opposes is invalid, motivating the trustee give uptake in order to then take a stance.

Phenomenologically

Discourse responsiveness is a deeply embedded part of what it means to be human.²⁰⁰ The merest suggestion of agency is enough to arouse us to a mode of responsiveness. If the dog grunts in her sleep, I find myself answering her with playful replies. The sun goes behind a cloud while my friend is sunbathing, and my friend scolds the sun. If the television freezes for a second, I swear at it for its insolence, and if my computer takes too long to boot up, I stroke it and say encouraging things. We do these things with an awareness of the whimsy involved in our responding to inanimate objects as if they were discourse participants.

We return to the basis for this tendency in Chapter 6, but for now the contrast shows all we need it to: to excommunicate a rational discourse participant

¹⁹⁹ At least, many of us who are philosophers particularly have this reflex.

²⁰⁰ McKinney, 'Communication, Labor, and Communicative Labor', 63; Michael Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2010).

and then swear at inanimate objects is absurd. The most minimal suggestion of agency or noise that could be loosely communicative elicits our responsiveness. So when Jimmy makes the *I TAKE HER POINT* move, he creates a foil against which the trustee's excommunication move shows up as the disingenuous absurdity that it is.

The phenomenological structure of responsiveness, the baiting of banal competitiveness, and the endogenous implications of the structure of discourse all contribute to the observer's reflexive drive to take a stance when prompted by the *I TAKE HER POINT* move. More compellingly, a fourth form of pressure can arise over and above the other three, namely, the normative pressure of knowing that I have treated a person as less than a full participant of rational, discursive humanity. Knowing that I have miscategorised someone in such a substantial way creates a moral pressure to resolve the issue by recategorising the speaker as a person with standing to make claims.²⁰¹

The aim here has been to show how Jimmy's individual listening behaviour, as flagged by the *I TAKE HER POINT* move, can give rise to changes in others' behaviour by way of a motivational complex which prompts and motivates others to extend their listening habits to the voices of the blues. As I mentioned before, there are additional ways Jimmy could affect the system, given his hoped-for platform as a community leader, but I have purposefully tied the motivational complex not to Jimmy's prestige, but rather to the public impacts of their interactions, to show that *any* individual's behaviour, as a constituent of the discourse ecosystem, constitutes a change in the discourse ecology, which could in principle lead to an overall change in the way the discourse structures the behaviour of its constituents in general. Let's assume that Jimmy does *not* in the end run for mayor. His change in behaviour can still trigger changes in the wider discourse ecology, albeit with a different path of influence through his personal

²⁰¹ As with moral pressures generally, the effects will not be universally and equally felt. Some speakers will be inclined to be territorial about their voice's share in the discourse ecology. This reaction to moral pressure is vicious in ways which are beside the point of the discussion at hand.

social networks. The motivational complex gives us the machinery of this. It remains now to look at how Jimmy's change scales up and ripples outward across the discourse ecosystem.

5. Large-Scale Change Across the System

The empirical literature on how changes spread across social networks is vast and heterogenous, and discussing these models is well beyond the scope of this project. Even so, we need a way to rigorise the idea of Jimmy's new listening habits spreading across the discursive ecosystem. We do not want to be blithe about assuming that Jimmy's idealistic behaviour can and will rectify a deeply entrenched and subtly operative state of discursive injustice between the greens and the blues. For a more measured approach, therefore, I return to the linguistic literature on language change, which explores the progression of novel usages, for example, from novel coinage and 'nonce' words to established word.

The processes by which new words get added to a language is called *Lexicalisation*. Lexicalisation includes many different kinds of processes. Common to all kinds of lexicalisation is the progression from novelty to institutionalisation, as I mentioned in Section 3. In their research survey on language change processes, Brinton and Traugott note, "The focus here is not strictly on structural processes; rather, "institutionalization" refers to the spread of a usage to a community and its establishment as the norm. It is "the integration of a lexical item, with a particular form and meaning, into the existing stock of words as a generally acceptable and current lexeme."²⁰²

What Jimmy hopes to accomplish can also be described as a process of institutionalisation, in that he hopes his listening behaviour will spread across his

²⁰² Brinton and Traugott, *Lexicalization and Language Change*, 45. They are citing Leonhard Lipka, *English Lexicology: Lexical Structure, Word Semantics & Word-Formation*, 3rd revised edn. of *An Outline of English Lexicology* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2002), 112; who refers to similar definitions by Randolph Quirk et al., *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London and New York: Longman, 1985), 1522; and Laurie Bauer, *English Word Formation*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 48; see also Leonhard Lipka, 'Lexicalization and Institutionalization', ed. Asher and Simpson, vol. IV, 1994, 2164–67.

community and become established as the norm. As with lexicalisation, the behaviour begins as something local, novel, and in a sense ‘private’, since it is a shift in Jimmy’s attitudes and actions in meetings with Gina and following conversations in which Jimmy makes the *I TAKE HER POINT* move. And again, as with lexicalisation, this local, novel behaviour becomes exposed to wider swathes of the community, becoming a public phenomenon which is recognised, and then integrated as an option, and then established as a norm. Of course, these processes are not mechanistic; it is often the case that people employ novel usages which never become lexicalized. If all it took to rectify the injustice in the green and blue discourse ecology were one idealistic mayoral candidate, Jimmy’s world—and ours—would look unrecognisably different.

The unpredictability of lexicalisation processes is two-fold: we can never quite predict how the meaning of the novel form will settle as it becomes institutionalised, and we can never quite predict when a novel usage will spread widely enough to become institutionalised. Both these uncertainties are instructive for Jimmy’s case, so we’ll take both in turn. First, Brinton and Traugott note that for a novel usage to take off, it should be a construction which can be derived from familiar words and bits and processes (or, technically: stems, morphemes, and derivational rules); it should serve an immediate communicative need and be understandable from its context.²⁰³ But in the process of institutionalisation, the meaning ‘often comes to be limited, specialized, or fixed in meaning. It may narrow to a subset (perhaps one) of its possible meanings, become relatively independent of context, and be included in the dictionary along with more generic meanings.’²⁰⁴ When word bits join up, they have the potential to imply a range of different meanings; this is the feature which gives language its incredible productive and creative capacity.

²⁰³ Brinton and Traugott, *Lexicalization and Language Change*, 45.

²⁰⁴ Brinton and Traugott, 45; citing Mary Ellen Ryder, ‘Complex -Er Nominals: Where Grammaticalization and Lexicalization Meet?’, in *Between Grammar and Lexicon*, ed. Ellen Contini-Morava and Yishai Tobin (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1999), 305–6.

Consider the different implications of ‘over’ in *OVERLOOK*, *OVERSEE*, and *WATCH OVER*. All three formations combine the preposition ‘over’ with a verb of vision, but the first implies failure to attend to something. The second implies responsibility to attend to something. The third implies constancy of attending to something, whether out of responsibility or otherwise. The bits do not mandate or determine that the meanings land as they have done; rather, the meanings are established by social institution and norms of usage. Thus, ‘What makes an expression a lexical item, what makes it part of the speech community’s common dictionary, is, firstly, that the meaning of the expression is not (totally) predictable from its form, secondly, that it behaves as a minimal unit for certain syntactic purposes, and third, that it is a *social institution*.’²⁰⁵ The establishment of familiar and stable usages is a matter of social convention, without which we would have no particular means (apart from context, sometimes) of discerning the different implications of ‘over’ in the verbs above.

In my view, the whimsical conventionality of lexicalisation helps to make sense of what Jimmy is hoping to achieve with respect to his discourse ecology. As we’ve already mentioned, the *I TAKE HER POINT* move engages only a very thin concept of listening, and it could misfire. Jimmy’s observers might simply conclude that Jimmy is acting out of mere sentimentality, or out of politically instrumental motivations, and ignore the pull of the *I TAKE HER POINT* move. The observers might take Jimmy to be patronising the blues in the worst sense of the term, rather than legitimately listening. The observers might even doubt whether Jimmy could have listened to the blues, as he claims to have done, perhaps through a failure on his part as a prestigious green aspiring politician to empathise with the lived experiences of those in the blue community. Assuming (as I stipulated above) that Jimmy has in fact learned to be a good listener to the blues, and that they as a community attest this, Jimmy’s hope is that his novel listening behaviour

²⁰⁵ Andrew Pawley and Frances Hodgetts Syder, ‘Two Puzzles for Linguistic Theory: Nativelike Selection and Nativelike Fluency’, in *Language and Communication* (London and New York: Longman, 1983), 209; italics original.

and use of the prompting move would be the grain around which a new social institution crystalises.

What makes this possible, as with lexicalisation, is that Jimmy's behaviour is made up of familiar processes (because all greens already have the habit of listening to at least some people), serves an immediate communicative need (resolving the pressures invoked by the '*I TAKE HER POINT*' signalling move), and has a meaning which can be inferred from context (since Gina is a rational being and, as we have stipulated, is credible as well). These features together provide a bridging context²⁰⁶ in which the new behaviour makes at least as much sense as the old behaviour and can be adopted with little effort or cost. Both behavioural possibilities co-exist; some people listen to the blues (like Jimmy) and some people do not.

When Jimmy makes the *I TAKE HER POINT* move he adds to the precedent for listening rather than not, and because both behaviours are equally in reach, observers may easily enough respond to the motivational complex enacted by this move. The bridging context is what makes it feasible for the behavioural change to come in incrementally and then subsequently scale outward across the community. Put otherwise, the bridging context is the ground where the cultivation of the new social institution can take place. As Dewey says, when we desire flowers in the desert, we are inclined then to undertake 'the work that makes the desert blossom, [the] *cultivation* of plants. Every ideal is preceded by an actuality; but the ideal is more than a repetition in inner image of the actual. It projects in securer and wider and fuller form some good which has been previously experienced in a precarious, accidental, fleeting way.'²⁰⁷

Changing the discourse ecology is possible because the new norm (listening to blue voices) is already present, albeit in a 'precarious, accidental, fleeting way'. Jimmy's use of the *I TAKE HER POINT* move takes his precarious, individually cultivated habit of listening to the blues (trusting them, just as he

²⁰⁶ Brinton and Traugott, *Lexicalization and Language Change*, 25–31.

²⁰⁷ Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, 23; italics original.

would trust Hawking, to be people saying things for reasons) and makes it show up to others in the ecosystem, giving it an increased presence in the ecosystem alongside the established alternative (taking the blues to be animal bodies making noises with strident voices and an insolent eyebrow), adding some motivational pressure in a way which invites observers to join him in practicing listening to the blues: cultivating flowers in the desert.

When Jimmy's appeal is successful, we would expect to see his observers—those exposed to his discourse behaviour by the *I TAKE HER POINT* move—start to do the same as Jimmy. They listen to the blues. They make use of the *I TAKE HER POINT* move, prompting those in their own networks to notice they have been epistemically negligent with respect to the voices of the blues and seek to resolve this discrepancy. The scale of growth would, we can assume, depend on the usual social network factors that structure social change. Suppose some of the people around Jimmy are poised to be network brokers who participate in multiple overlapping networks. When they adopt the behavioural change, they introduce the possibility for geometric growth in people listening to the blues as, through them, several networks within the discourse ecology become simultaneously hit with the *I TAKE HER POINT* move. If some of the people in these networks are trusted figures and social influencers, the change will be further spurred on.

This series of 'ifs' mirrors the same uncertainty which characterizes linguistic change processes, including lexicalisation. It is immensely difficult to predict which people will take up a new usage, when the usage will spread, and whether the usage will be adopted only in isolated network clusters or will spread across the community as a whole. It depends on what choices people make. It depends on how people respond to the behaviour of others in their discursive ecology and what choices they make in response to the *I TAKE HER POINT* move. For this reason, we cannot provide Jimmy with a sure-fire recipe for social change. All we can do here is to affirm the conceptual possibility for his individual discursive behaviour to constitute a change in the discursive ecology, which *could* potentially

give rise in due course to the institutionalisation of a new norm of listening to the blues.

It Could Happen

The argument we have made here strikes me as being at once both strikingly minimalist and frighteningly audacious. Using the Discourse Ecology Model, we looked at how a shift in one person's listening behaviour (conceived here as led by a change in motivations) could lead to system-wide shifts in discursive habits. If, despite the unpredictability of social change, the *I TAKE HER POINT* move carries as much force as we hope it would, then we theoretically have a model for how individuals' morally motivated decisions to listen to people to whom they have not been in the habit of listening could initiate a system-wide change in a discourse ecology. For this model to help us conceive how we might actively pursue such changes, it will need to be fleshed out with a precise, positive account of the conversational behaviours that actually constitute listening. That will be the task for the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Pragmatics of Listening

'Words are events, they do things, change things. They transform both speaker and hearer; they feed energy back and forth and amplify it. They feed understanding or emotion back and forth and amplify it.'

—Ursula K. Le Guin²⁰⁸

The aim of this chapter is to build an account of what infra-doings, in terms of patterned conversational behaviours, comprise the policies of responsiveness we evaluate as being praiseworthy or blameworthy. In the last chapter, we looked at how Jimmy might deploy his motivation to change his listening behaviour by thinking about the differences in how he feels about and responds to the things people say when he is, or is not, inclined to listen to them. But perhaps Jimmy would like a more specific set of guidelines to help him look directly at his conversational behaviours and change them out for better ones—certainly, we want a theory of listening to provide this! Moreover, the motivational shift helps Jimmy attend to what he is doing in conversation, but it does not help Jimmy see how what he is doing *alters* or differently constitutes Gina's participation in, and the progress of, the conversation. That is, a conversation is something that two interlocutors build together; Gina quite literally cannot have the conversation she wants to have with Jimmy if he is being conversationally uncooperative. If Jimmy wants to move himself out of Gina's way and let her say

²⁰⁸ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Wave in the Mind: Talks and Essays on the Writer, the Reader, and the Imagination* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2004), 199.

what she needs to say, and if he wants to hear and respond rightly to whatever it is that she is saying to him, then he should probably go further than just not blocking her. Rather, in McKinney's terms, he should take responsibility for his part of the bargain of being a conversational co-participant.²⁰⁹ He needs to do his share of the conversational labour.

Some of the things he should do can be expressed as truisms: pay more attention, do not interrupt, do not be distracted. These are indeed important things to do as part of listening well, but they do not offer much by way of explaining *how*. Other guidance available includes items from Medina's list of what a virtuous listener does, as mentioned in Chapter 1: know when to shut up, listen for silences, let the other person set the tone, and so on.²¹⁰ These suggestions are also wise, and they might serve Jimmy well as reminders not to block Gina from saying her piece. But what he seeks now, and what people ask me for most often in connection with this project, is a description of what *to* do to accomplish good listening, and how to make those things happen. We want a list of infra-doings with enough theoretical depth and complexity to give us a robust account of how conversational norms work, given how conversations work, and how we can practice behaviour that honours those norms.

Thus, we begin by looking at how conversations work. We need a model based not on an idealised theory of language in a vacuum or a bottle, but on empirically informed theory of conversation as it happens 'in the wild', in real contexts, with all the mess of socio-political and normative contexts. We find such theories in a specialist literature based in sociology, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, interactional linguistics, and communication science. (What 'field' the literature is found in is subject to the vagaries of how institutions and departments name their subfields, hence the muddy variety here.) Two parts of the conversation literature will be in focus here: Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis (henceforth EMCA) and a strain of empirical, quantitative

²⁰⁹ McKinney, 'Communication, Labor, and Communicative Labor', 56–57, 94.

²¹⁰ Medina, 'Varieties of Hermeneutical Injustice', 48.

research I will lump under the term Interactional Linguistics (henceforth IL), for present purposes.

This chapter differs from the previous chapters in that it is heavy on empirical insights and does not deal so closely with the conceptual analysis themes from the previous chapters. This is by design. The rhythm of what follows can be described in this way: each section involves the introduction of a body of empirical work, and how that work can be brought to bear on conversational norms and behaviours. Once the empirical lens is focused on the behaviours in question, I pull away from the originating body of empirical work and start building out arguments by analogy; brief narrative scenarios are provided so that we can see how these conversational behaviours work (and break down). Across each section, then, we begin with citation-heavy subsections and then move toward increasingly original reflections on what interpretations can be drawn. This is not the most conventional method of philosophical writing, but it provides a reasonably sturdy basis for articulating what conversational behaviours are most apt for description as *infra-doings of listening as such*.

Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis

EMCA first grew out of sociologist Harold Garfinkel's work on trust and interaction in the 1960's.²¹¹ Specifically, Garfinkel was exploring how trust plays a role in action itself, and how we create meaningful order and structure in everyday interactions by our actions and reactions.²¹² The patterns by which we do this are often implicit, but Garfinkel would instruct his students to complete 'tutorial exercises', or little experiments, in which they would purposefully flout ordinary norms in mundane social situations in their lives. By acting in such unexpected

²¹¹ Garfinkel, 'A Conception of, and Experiments with, "Trust" as a Condition of Stable Concerted Actions'; Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*.

²¹² Dirk vom Lehn, 'Harold Garfinkel: – Experimenting with Social Order', in *The Interactionist Imagination*, ed. Michael Hviid Jacobsen (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), 244–45, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58184-6_9.

ways, they create an occasion for the people they interact with to take explicit steps to restore meaningful order and structure in the interaction.²¹³

It is interesting to see just how far they could go with these exercises—which later came to be called *breaching* experiments, before the people around them would react explicitly to the breaching of the tacit norms. This is the core idea of Ethnomethodology:

In this view, social order arises in, and through, the methodical production of action. It is the aim of ethnomethodological research to reveal the methods that underlie the ongoing production of social order. They produce descriptions that exhibit these methods from the perspective of the actors and that can be treated as accounts for actions.²¹⁴

One lesson we can take from the ethnomethodological approach is that when things seem to be out of order, people take explicit action to rebuild order. To understand the underlying structure of interpersonal interaction, we may want to look at where things have gone wrong, in order to see how people react, and how they try to make it right. For our purposes here, we want an understanding of not just of the structures and constitutive norms driving conversational behaviour, but also a sense of where moral norms come into play. From conversation analyses we can get a sense of the point at which point people's reaction indicates that something is out of order, to what degree, and how severe the breach seems to be.

Think of this in terms of our metro station platform from Chapter 2: if an elbow bumps you, you might think nothing of it, or possibly expect an apology, but fine, this happens. But how directed, obvious, repetitive, persistent, or forceful does the elbow bump have to be before you start taking it personally? How bad do things have to get before you shift from being vaguely annoyed with 'people' to being angry that *this* person did this to you? We might say that periodic elbow bumps are to be expected, but *this* person 'crossed a line'. That line is what we are looking for. Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology inspires the idea that one way to find

²¹³ Lehn, 249.

²¹⁴ Lehn, 243.

out where the lines are is by crossing them. The more hostile the reaction to crossing the line, the more likely we are dealing with a line that represents some kind of morally significant norm.

We revisit the breaching approach to locating norms in more detail in Section 1.2, but before we get to that, we look at what came out of his work: specifically, the Conversation Analysis part of EMCA. Following Garfinkel's lead, sociologists Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson recorded and closely analysed ordinary conversations between people, evaluating them for their structure, for how the elements of conversations are organised into turn sequences, and how conversations go off the rails and either get repaired or break down. Jefferson devised a system for transcribing recordings to facilitate conversation analysis and to highlight its turn taking structure; Charles Goodwin and John Heritage helped codify the growing body of work into a coherent literature.²¹⁵ Today, EMCA work is being done under a variety of disciplinary headings, but most of my examples in the thesis are drawn from the work of professor of social interaction Elizabeth Stokoe and linguist Nick Enfield, who have both published books quite recently, giving accessible and up-to-date overviews of what Conversation Analysts have learned.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Harvey Sacks, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, 'A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation', *Language* 50, no. 4 (December 1974): 696, <https://doi.org/10.2307/412243>; Charles Goodwin, *Conversational Organization: Interaction between Speakers and Hearers*, Language, Thought, and Culture (New York: Academic Press, 1981); J. Maxwell Atkinson and John Heritage, *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10459525>; Charles Goodwin and John Heritage, 'Conversation Analysis', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 283–307; Emanuel A. Schegloff, *Sequence Organization in Interaction: A Primer in Conversation Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jack Sidnell, *Conversation Analysis: Comparative Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511635670>; Lorenza Mondada, 'The Management of Knowledge Discrepancies and of Epistemic Changes in Institutional Interactions', in *The Morality of Knowledge in Conversation*, ed. Tanya Stivers, Lorenza Mondada, and Jakob Steensig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 27–57, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511921674.003>.

²¹⁶ Stokoe, *Talk*; Enfield, *How We Talk*.

Interactional Linguistics

In 1970, a paper was published by Victor Yngve, a linguist who helped pioneer computational linguistics, which involves getting computers to analyse language: a field that has flourished and seen application in the refining of Google's search algorithms, the responsiveness of Apple's Siri, and even the friendly voice reading out directions from a GPS. Yngve noticed, as often happens when we try to teach computers to do tasks that seem relatively straightforward for us to do, that the realities turn out to be much more complex than we tend to assume. In this case, Yngve noticed that, we tend to think of conversation being the sort of thing where one person signals across a channel, like a phone line, at a time. But the reality of talk shows that we signal across multiple channels at once, in both directions. In the paper, called 'On Getting a Word in Edgewise', Yngve pointed out that we actively participate in the conversational turns others take, via what he called the *back channel*.²¹⁷ Participation from the back channel is part of the structure of how we talk, and without it, communication does not go so well.

Despite the seeming obviousness of his claim, Yngve's point was not given prominent attention for a few decades. As with the Message in a Bottle framework, we find it much easier when building theories to think of conversation as a single sequence of messages being swapped, in order, via one channel, because then we can look at discrete actions without being troubled by the mess and noise of the back channel—certainly for the computational linguist and the programmer of communication technologies, it is easier this way as well.

But in a landmark study in 2000, Janet Bavelas, Linda Coates, and Trudy Johnson set up a series of laboratory experiments to measure the effects of what happens in the back channel.²¹⁸ Subjects were paired; one would tell a story from their life while the other listened. Some listeners were instructed to listen so they could retell the story themselves; some were instructed to listen and count the verbs. Some were instructed to listen whilst counting backwards from one

²¹⁷ Yngve, 'On Getting a Word in Edgewise.'

²¹⁸ Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson, 'Listeners as Co-Narrators'.

hundred, and so on. Bavelas and her team were able to measure what kinds of signals came from the back channel under each condition, as well as how the narrator's telling was altered by the various back channel conditions. According to Enfield, their findings show that 'there is an especially close relationship between the behavior of speaker and listener, where their contributions interlock.'²¹⁹ In measuring how closely related the speaker and listener roles are, Bavelas et al. found that speakers need a listener's participation, without which the fluency and quality of not just the narrative overall, but of the narrator's speech itself, are worse.²²⁰

What do we do with this?

To build a theory of how to listen to people, particularly one which holds that listening is behaviour which we evaluate as morally significant, we need a way to process what the literatures above tell us. Inspired by ethnomethodology, we will take it that a good way to find 'the line' is to see where people react to behaviour they perceive as 'crossing the line'. In the sections that follow, we look at conversational behaviour in three ways:

§1 Inter-turn: EMCA work from Stokoe shows us the patterns which structure a conversation across turns, especially in short, primarily functional exchanges like getting information from a barista.

§2 Intra-turn: IL work from Bavelas et al. shows us the patterns in main channel and back channel behaviour within an extend turn, like telling a story from one's own life.

§3 Meta-turn: Returning to formal pragmatics for a bit to pick up some conceptual materials, we look at what people are doing with their turns, what those turns accomplish, and how subsequent actions and reactions are structured by the whole picture of the conversation.

Within each of these three sections, we work in three stages. First, we look at the patterns of behaviour—the infra-doings—which comprise the structure at the level of analysis under consideration. That is to say, we find out the constitutive

²¹⁹ Enfield, *How We Talk*, 110–15.

²²⁰ Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson, 'Listeners as Co-Narrators'.

norms for that level: the norms which tell us how to do conversation. Then, we look at patterns of behaviour which are seen as breaching the normal structure. Finally, we look at how the hostility toward breaches shows us in each case what it is that people care about; which conversational norms seem to have moral weight, and what this shows us about what people take to be the moral normativity of listening.

It may be helpful to think of this chapter as filling in the matrix below.

Table 1

Structural Register	Infra-Doings	Breaching	Normativity
INTER-TURN (Conversation Analysis)	→	→	→
INTRA-TURN (Interactional Linguistics)			
META-TURN (Common Ground Pragmatics)			

1. Inter-Turn Structure (EMCA)

People often assume²²¹ that the ordinary, unscripted ‘chat’ of daily life is too chaotic and unstructured to be of interest for building up theories of communication, language, and social life. But the transcriptions of CA consistently reveal that conversational talk is highly organised and systematic. Stokoe writes,

And we are quite unaware of how systematic our talk is, and how different words lead to different outcomes. So while we all keep talking, we are not good at understanding precisely what went wrong in an encounter, or what

²²¹ For example, even Noam Chomsky described conversation as a ‘disorderly phenomenon’, which I find astonishing; see Stokoe, *Talk*, 2.

went right. Analysing real talk in the wild—and in slow motion—shows us the incredible power talk has to shape our daily lives.²²²

CA relies on gathered archives of recorded speech from real interactions, especially in situations where conversations would already be recorded anyway. Customer service interactions are often recorded so that companies can work on improving customer satisfaction, and negotiators in high-risk situations (such as active shooter situations or suicide risk situations) wear body cameras in order to record the interactions. These are just two of the examples Stokoe gives of the kinds of conversation she has archived, often by request, both for her own research purposes and in order that her research might be able to inform improvements to services in these areas.

Stokoe notes at the outset that when we begin to analyse real-time transcripts, we find many clichés and assumptions about talk to be untrue. In particular, she writes:

The idea that taking a turn in a conversation requires ‘processing time’, producing pauses, is another myth about our talk that we will bust in this book. In fact, we can and do respond very quickly within milliseconds. Indeed, speakers are actually monitoring reactions while their own turn is in progress, which is what enables such rapid interchange to take place. And the fact that we (can) respond quickly provides us with the evidence that delays, gaps, silences indicate an upcoming problem...²²³

There are two key features of talk reflected in these statements which will figure heavily in the arguments that follow. One is that talk does not follow a rigid sequence in which a participant speaks, waits, hears, decides, speaks, waits, hears, decides, speaks, and so on (as if they were sending messages back and forth in sealed bottles across a wide sea). Rather, participants in an exchange are *both* actively involved at all stages in monitoring and responding to each other, overlapping turns simultaneously, and slipping words in ‘edgeways’ while others

²²² Stokoe, 2.

²²³ Stokoe, 10.

speak. From a structural standpoint, CA shows that this kind of pattern is normal for talk.

The other key feature is that talk is filled with variations from the patterns. Some such variations are unobstructive; some are loaded, but these variations are normal. When talk varies too far from the norms, we have an indication that something is beginning to go wrong. The interaction is likely either to turn into conflict, or to dissolve into incoherent nonsense. Stokoe clarifies this point:

Conversation analysis is not a branch of behaviourism. Saying 'hello' does not guarantee a 'hello' in response. In fact, a missing 'hello' can indicate mishearing, rudeness, or some other potential communication problem. But the take-home message is that because conversations do regularly open [in patterned and predictable ways], something interesting is happening when the pattern breaks.²²⁴

This point is important to stress, if the methodology in this chapter is to work. We saw in Chapter 4 that language structures are in many ways elastic, evolving, and open for creative innovation. Likewise, conversational patterns can sustain a lot of novel variation—bending, so to speak—without actually breaking down. The ethnomethodologist plays with this elasticity, seeing how much variation can be sustained before a breach is accomplished. Usually, pattern breaks trigger the participants to initiate 'repair' tactics, which are themselves highly structured, patterned behaviours of getting things back on track.²²⁵ So to see where the normative lines fall, a breacher will need to not only break from the pattern, but likely also flout several attempts at repair sequences before the breach is accomplished. But before we get to that, we look at the constitutive patterns themselves.

²²⁴ Stokoe, 19.

²²⁵ Enfield, *How We Talk*, 145 ff. It is interesting to note that, in this book, Enfield gathers CA data from linguists working across several major language families to see what varies between them and what holds across the board (quite a bit, actually!); he also compares these patterns to the patterned and conversation-like exchanges between members of various animal species.

To begin, we look at the simple exchanges of customer service such as those Stokoe references throughout, and which are common in CA literature on the whole. The formulaic, brief interactions have an overtly functional aim—to sort out something a customer needs—so it is fairly easy to tell whether or not the conversation goes well and whether the pragmatic aims of the speakers are accomplished.

1.1 Infra-Doings

Consider two variations of a familiar interaction, in which you ('Customer') are at a coffee shop and are hoping to connect to the WiFi. You hail a barista, and have the following exchange:

Barista A

Customer: Do you have WiFi here?

Barista: We do! The network name and password are there, on the wall.

C: Thanks!

B: [Smiles]

In this case, the barista provides good customer service (relative to convention-specified norms of how to do customer service), understanding what the customer is asking for and replying with the needed information. Now consider a variant:

Barista B

C: Do you have WiFi here?

B: Yep.

C: Great, er, and what is the network called?

B: Same as the name of the café.

C: Thanks. And is there a password needed?

B: Yes.

C: Uhm, oh. And what is the password please?

In this case, the barista does not provide good customer service. Although she responds to each request for information with an answer of information, the responses she provides do not properly fit with the customer's queries. If we look just at the surface structure of the exchange, we see validly formulated questions

and answers falling in a reasonable sequence. The barista is not lying, nor is she failing to supply her 'turns' in the conversation at the right points.

According to CA, conversation is structured by a turn-taking rhythm. Sequences of activity are constructed from units called 'adjacency pairs'.²²⁶ Each 'turn' in the conversation is followed by an adjacent turn which responds to the one before. In any conversation, these alternating adjacency pairs form the basic building blocks. Stokoe explains:

After one speaker has produced a 'first pair part', their recipient is expected to respond with a turn that delivers a second action. The second action is paired with, and fitted to, the first one – for instance, 'question-answer'; 'greeting-greeting'; 'invitation-acceptance'; 'request-offer'. The second action is the 'second pair part'.²²⁷

These pairings should look familiar, following the sorts of categories we cite in philosophy of language when identifying types of illocution, or similar. But what CA goes on to show is the wide range of variability in how these types of turns are combined into adjacency pairs.

For example, a question could be met with an answer which does or does not correctly fit with the type of information that the question was meant to elicit. A question could likewise be met with a telling hesitation or a damning silence, instead of an utterance. Stokoe notes:

Once the first pair part has been produced, almost *anything* produced next comprises the second pair part. This includes silence and delay. The second pair part may be inspected for its timeliness... whether or not it is fitted properly to the first... and whether or not it helps the overall sequence progress smoothly or stall and falter.²²⁸

If utterances are the basic building blocks of speech, adjacency pairs are the basic building blocks of the turn-taking, joint communicative endeavour we call

²²⁶ Stokoe, *Talk*, 43.

²²⁷ Stokoe, 43.

²²⁸ Stokoe, 43–44.

conversation. That *pairs* of turns are the basic unit is demonstrated across countless examples from Stokoe’s archives of recorded interactions, in which the outcome of a conversation radically changes whenever a question, for example, is met with a pause rather than an immediate response.

What the Barista scenarios show is the difference between well-fitted and poorly-fitted adjacency pairs. In Barista A, the first adjacency pair is a question-answer sequence. The question is of the type requesting information, and the answer is of the type providing that information. Notice that this is also true of the four pairs in Barista B: questions requesting information are met with answers providing that information. However, the answers do not fit so well. Barista B gives precise, accurate answers to each question asked, whilst disregarding the rather obvious aim with which the questions are asked.

Table 2

INTER-TURN: Conversation Analysis		
Infra-doings	Breaching	Normativity
A respondent recognises the aims of the speaker’s turns; completes adjacent pair structures with appropriately fitted second pair parts.		

An aside about convention: we have a rich array of tacit social conventions that prescribe polite ways of saying things or asking for things. Politeness often involves being somewhat indirect in various ways—ways that vary by context, by social group, by class, etc. Again, these norms of politeness are stable and recognisable. Much of the humour in sit-coms comes from characters behaving in ways that misapply or flout these norms, making them suddenly show up explicitly. A character who takes an indirect request literally reveals to the audience the slight mismatch between the form of the request and the aim of the

request. We will not get caught up in these issues here, interesting as it would be to explore the social implications of a listener who exploits this tension.²²⁹

Further, if we are assuming epistemic and conversational competence, and an interlocutor shows evidence of not being subscribed to the same conventions of conversation, this could be down to a difference in the specific subset of conversational norms, such as would arise if the interlocutor is from a different social group to mine (this often happens with language learners or when communicating across in-group/out-group lines). Alternatively, the non-subscription to certain norms may arise if the interlocutor has some unique idiolectal tendencies. This may be down to quirkiness, as in the case of Phoebe from the TV Show *Friends*, who consistently breaches conversational norms because that's who she is, in ways which her friends take to be non-hostile features of Phoebe's quirky approach to life and relationships in general. Phoebe's idiolectal breaching of conversational norms is a regular and recognisable part of the show's humour, as Stokoe notes.²³⁰

Similarly, idiolectal variation might be put down to a general individual tendency to be difficult in a non-personally directed way, i.e., for reasons of pedantry or to pose an air of superiority or punk mystique. A person with nonstandard proclivity for breaching conversational norms is the sort of person whose particularities are likely to be noted to you upon introduction. No doubt any of their friends would be able and quick to unpack the person's breaching tendency for you with a wry smile or a knowing shake of the head, saying, 'Don't take it personally.'

²²⁹ For example, committing to a norm specific to one's own social group and refusing to recognise another group's slightly different norms may function as a way of 'othering' a question asker by being obtuse, or by taking needless offense; see Dotson, 'Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing'; Rini, 'How to Take Offense'.

²³⁰ *Talk*, 38–39.

1.2 Breaching

To understand what is so strange about the literalist Barista B, we should first take a look at a couple examples of full on breaches from Garfinkel's tutorial exercises, which have come to be known as breaching experiments. Garfinkel instructed his students to 'engage an acquaintance or friend in an ordinary conversation and, without indicating that what the experimenter was saying was in any way out of the ordinary, to insist that the person clarify the sense of his commonplace remarks.' Here are some excerpts from the results ('S' indicates the subject of the experiment; 'E' indicates the student experimenter):²³¹

Case 3. On Friday night my husband and I were watching television. My husband remarked that he was tired. I asked, "How are you tired? Physically, mentally, or just bored?"

(S) "I don't know, I guess physically, mainly."

(E) "You mean that your muscles ache, or your bones?"

(S) "I guess so. Don't be so technical."

(S) (After more watching) "All these old movies have the same kind of old iron bedstead in them."

(E) "What do you mean? Do you mean all old movies, or some of them, or just the ones you have seen?"

(S) "What's the matter with you? You know what I mean."

(E) "I wish you would be more specific."

(S) "You know what I mean! Drop dead!"

Case 6. The victim waved his hand cheerily.

(S) "How are you?"

(E) "How am I in regard to what? My health, my finance, my schoolwork, my peace of mind, my..."

(S) (Red in the face and suddenly out of control.) "Look! I was just trying to be polite. Frankly, I don't give a damn how you are."

²³¹ Garfinkel, 'A Conception of, and Experiments with, "Trust" as a Condition of Stable Concerted Actions', 221-23.

What we see in each case is that, within a very short sequence of turns, the subjects of the experiments became hostile with frustration, resulting in ‘interactional breakdowns which were extraordinarily rapid and complete’.²³² Heritage explains the phenomenon, saying, ‘In each case, the S took for granted that the E would supply whatever unstated understandings would be required in order to make recognizable sense of his talk. This requirement, as we shall see, pervades all interaction’.²³³ This interpretation of conversational breakdown due to breaching has given rise to a sub-branch of Conversation Analysis which looks at how people talk about morality and knowledge, and the moral obligations and entitlements that govern how we lay claim to, discuss, and evaluate knowledge.²³⁴

We will return to this point about background knowledge and reciprocal perspectives throughout this chapter. In this case, what I want to focus on is the point that when conversational norms are breached, the resulting disturbance has two ways it can go: toward senselessness and incoherence, or towards a hostility, when the breach is interpreted as a kind of motivated choice on the part of the experimenter. As Heritage notes, ‘failure to apply background knowledge when interacting with others has moral consequences. Reflecting on these experiments, Heritage concluded that “there is no quicker way, it appears, of provoking moral outrage than by not using background knowledge to make sense of other people’s actions.”’²³⁵

Our instinct as philosophers at this point would be to look to Austinian or Gricean frameworks to find ways of labelling the malfunction in Barista B, as a mistake about implicatures or illocutions or some such, focusing on charting the

²³² Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*, 81.

²³³ Heritage, 81.

²³⁴ Tanya Stivers, Lorenza Mondada, and Jakob Steensig, *The Morality of Knowledge in Conversation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²³⁵ Trine Heinemann, Anna Lindström, and Jakob Steensig, ‘Addressing Epistemic Incongruence in Question–Answer Sequences through the Use of Epistemic Adverbs’, in *The Morality of Knowledge in Conversation*, ed. Tanya Stivers, Lorenza Mondada, and Jakob Steensig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 107, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511921674.006>. Citation is to Heritage 1984b, 182.

language structures at play in an impersonal, functional way. A benefit of working from sociological texts here is that the sociologists' instinct is to look at the way people's actions and choices in conversation play out as *relational* moves. If the aim of the breaching experiments was to introduce such a disturbance of conversational norms that the exchange would fall into senseless incoherence, this aim was rarely realised; instead, the subjects of the experiments consistently attributed the upheaval not to chaotic malfunction but motivated choice, responding not with baffled inactivity or discontinuation of attempts at discourse, but with intra-discursive reactions of moral outrage and hostility: not a failure of conversational norms, but a wilful usage of departures from the norms on the part of the experimenters, employed for some communicative end.²³⁶

So persistent was this effect that even once the experimenter explained to the subject the reason for the breaching, the subjects were reluctant to be pacified. Even once they understood that the breach behaviours were merely done as part of an assignment for a class, the subjects continued to interpret the breaches as being chosen and interpersonally directed ('Why did you choose *me* to try this on?'). Heritage notes, 'These individuals accountably treat their own and one another's actions as the products of "motivated choices" and, as such, designed with respect to the specifics of settings and their constituent participants.'²³⁷ Our communicative success depends on an underlying expectation that the various behaviours in a conversational exchange are, by and large, chosen and meaningful. This expectation is called a relevance framework, which we will return to in Chapter 6. This expectation is also the reason why, as Stokoe noted above, *anything* which follows a move in a conversation is liable to be interpreted as a response to the preceding turn, even silence and pauses.²³⁸

²³⁶ Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*, 98–99.

²³⁷ Heritage, 101.

²³⁸ For example, a two second pause before answering a question like, 'Do you still love me?' would be taken as indicative of a problem, even if the answer given is 'Of course I do!' The fact that the pause came first is not something conversation participants ignore, and might serve as a very efficient way to signal the beginning of the end of a relationship; see examples from Stokoe, *Talk*, 33–36.

The expectation of relevance allows us to interpret people's subsequent conversational behaviours as meaningfully related to what came before. If a behaviour does not seem to bear any meaningful relation, we assume repair tactics are needed. If an interlocutor's responses to a turn are noticeably inappropriate, we are generally left to choose between interpreting the turn as an error, or as a motivated choice. This is why, if we are not Ethnomethodologists, we stop to repair mistakes and misunderstandings, and why we apologise for incidental behaviours that might skew our interlocutor's interpretations of what we mean. One might explain a hesitation, for example, by saying 'I was not hostile, just nervous!' Or perhaps, 'I was not judging you; I just had a headache, hence my furrowed brow,' as if to say, 'Please do not interpret my weird response as a motivated choice indicating hostility to you.'

With this in mind, let's look back at the Barista B scenario. Suppose that you are the customer seeking access to WiFi. You can fairly assume, as it is common background knowledge by anyone familiar with English conversational norms and cafes as a social space, that the Barista knows perfectly well what the aim of your questioning is. You are not asking out of idle curiosity for information about whether WiFi is available and password protected; you are asking because you want to connect to the WiFi. This is why the Barista A scenario works: when you ask if the café has WiFi available, you are opening an inquiry the aim of which is clearly to get connected. You don't need to go through every single little inferential step in question and answer sequences, as if you were a philosopher-bot. Once you ask the opening question, Barista A understands the aim of your question and then answers you in the most efficient way possible, by directly providing you with access to the network ID and password. This is a familiar, normal interaction, especially for anyone working in a café.

Barista B chooses not to utilise this available background knowledge to make sense of your conversational moves, so although she answers with structurally apt adjacency pair parts, her turns serve to undermine any efficiency you might have hoped for in achieving your conversational aims. This is a

breaching pattern which Barista B might use for any number of reasons which means, as we noted above, the breaching likely serves some communicative or interpersonal aim. Perhaps Barista B thinks she is being comical, or, more likely, she is frustrated with a long stream of customers annoying her with petty concerns, so she wishes to return a bit of this frustration to the customers. Whatever the reason, her breaching of the normal pattern is not *wrong*, but rather, loaded.

It is for this reason that you could be expected, according to Garfinkel and Heritage, to respond with hostility and outrage for being treated by Barista B as someone for whom she would sooner depart from the norms and spend five adjacency pairs to accomplish what could have been done in one, rather than acknowledge your conversational aims. The choice appears as *motivated* and *directed* at you, the customer, implying that Barista is hostile to your communicative aims.²³⁹ This account of the breaching pattern explains why we so easily become riled at sulky or unhelpful customer service. Even though we know that the reason for the breach in many cases is due to a generalised frustration with 'customers' and should not be taken personally, it is difficult not to feel personally affronted when Barista B takes her frustration out on us.

Realistically, we expect our conversational obligations to each other to be greater or less depending on the roles we occupy, and the socio-political features that accompany those roles. Barista B is occupying a service role, and I would be reluctant to suppose that this kind of breach would have any moral weight; I would even be inclined, despite the reactive feeling of hostility, to decide upon reflection that her intransigence was not blameworthy, just annoying. But suppose a similar type of exchange occurred between a struggling student and a professor, when the student asks for clarification about an assignment. If the professor uses a breaching pattern like Barista B's, giving answers to every question but in the most unhelpful way possible, the normative stakes would be higher. Or suppose that an oncologist recommends a new treatment still in clinical trials, and to all questions

²³⁹ This isn't a particularly mysterious hostility, as anyone who has worked in a café can attest.

about the risks and factors for consideration, the oncologist gives perfunctory and vague answers, and redirects the patient to go read about it for themselves online. A professional negligence of this scale might be grounds for judging the breacher as morally blameworthy.

Table 3

INTER-TURN: Conversation Analysis		
Infra-doings	Breaching	Normativity
A respondent recognises the aims of the speaker's turns; completes adjacent pair structures with appropriately fitted second pair parts.	A respondent utilises second pair parts which structurally fit but are unhelpful for achieving the speaker's aims, putting an extra burden on the speaker to advance conversation through extra, unnecessary turn pairs.	

1.3 Inferring Normativity

The first item that requires attention as we look at the possible morality of inter-turn structure in conversations is the role played by the details of context, in the final two examples above. If we think about normativity in terms of interpersonal harms here, we might ask, 'What is the interlocutor doing to the speaker by giving inapt responses, that we deem it a harm warranting a moral judgement of blameworthiness?' This is a question which cannot be answered without consideration of the context—not just the immediate linguistic context, but the wider discursive environment, the roles the interlocutors play in their ecosystem, and normative context (the entitlements and obligations) upon which they are performatively enacting changes by their utterances.

On the traditional Message in a Bottle frame, we can factor in various bits of the context to bring some dimension to these kinds of exchanges, but on the Discourse Ecology Model, we expect the *whole* context to matter. Looking back at the paragraph above **Table 3**, imagine that instead of being written by a single author for an absent audience, the argument of the paragraph is instead unfolding as a conversation. You are sceptical that breaches brought about by ill-fitting but

structurally apt second pair parts are really something that merits moral attention. I say, 'Okay, but suppose it were a *professor*... a professor with a *vulnerable, struggling* student!' You say this example is more frustrating, but it would be difficult to prove the frustration truly merits moral blame. I say, 'Okay, but suppose it were an *oncologist*...' and so on.

On a frame which is built to exclude context, we mostly get a sense of utterances as being neutral in the vast majority of cases. Context can be factored in on such accounts, but doing so feels much like the rhythm of the multiple 'Okay, but suppose' sequence above. The harder we have to work to add in context, the more it feels like we are making excuses, or trying to justify a point that is a stretch. The ecological frame, however, *expects* context to be a vital part of the story. We cannot really evaluate what someone is doing to someone else via their conversational infra-doings if we do not know who they are, the socio-political relation between them, the role-based duties which may shape the normative context, and the way that the interlocutors are trying to performatively alter the normative context through their speech acts.

Inefficiency in achieving one's aims in conversation might seem a strange way to judge an interlocutor for purposeful use of ill-fitting second pair parts, if we are looking for moral normativity in conversational behaviour. But look back to Jimmy Green and Gina Blue. Jimmy's conversational uncooperativity made it difficult for Gina to say her piece. Divorced from context, that fact alone might not render his actions morally problematic. If a friendly supervisor reads a doctoral student's article draft and highlights *every possible objection* that Reviewer 2 might make, in order to optimise the student's chances at producing a publishable piece, this kind of uncooperativity would be a kindness. But Jimmy is not helping Gina strengthen her points—not intentionally, anyway. Rather, he is, as we said, seeking to avoid normative entanglement. Gina is trying to enact certain performative changes to their normative context by registering certain complaints, and if she is successful, she puts Jimmy under obligation to respond

in some way, preferably by conceding that the school district can do better by its blue students, and by making real world changes accordingly.

The normative entanglement is a necessary part of the picture for analysing what interlocutors do to each other by breaching or being conversationally uncooperative, as is the contextual information about the power dynamics in play. Jimmy is part of an oppressor class; Jimmy holds a powerful administrative position; Gina is part of a historically oppressed class; Gina has a powerful position with respect to the blue community but aside from her agile communication skills, she is in a down-power position relative to Jimmy. Jimmy's game of epistemic whack-a-mole can be traced out again here, this time in terms of conversational infra-doings, like those of Barista B, which have a surface-level, purported rightness of fit as responses to Gina's turns. But Jimmy's turns do not *really* fit well with the plainly manifest aims of Gina's conversational moves.

What infra-doings would give a better result here, when Jimmy starts really listening to Gina? We want to see three things. 1. Jimmy should pay attention what Gina is aiming to accomplish with her turns on the whole, acknowledging what her obvious purpose is and giving responses which *best* fit with her *overarching* aims, rather than which ostensibly fit only with each turn when the turns are snipped from context.²⁴⁰

2. Jimmy should pay attention to what Gina's turns are aiming to accomplish with respect to changes in their normative context, particularly where she is introducing moves which would put him under some sort of obligation. Jimmy's responses to these moves should fit not just the grammatical structure of her turns, but should acknowledge and accept the normative implications of her turns. 3. Jimmy should be mindful of the socio-political context; specifically, he

²⁴⁰ One may ask, if this is the case, should Jimmy just give Gina whatever she wants, and that way the do not even have to talk about matters? Her overarching aims are met, but it does not seem to right to describe this as 'listening'. This is because Gina's aims, and the aims of interpersonal communication in general, are directed not only at real world outcomes, but at the relational outcome of having expressed one's viewpoint and secured its uptake in the interlocutor's attention. See Chapter 6, Section 4. My thanks to Benedict Smith for raising this point.

should be mindful of the significant power he holds over the lives of a number of vulnerable and marginalised children as well as the comparative power he holds relative to Gina. When processing and responding to her turns, he should ensure that he compensates for this differential. Like giving himself a golf handicap, he should err on the side of taking Gina's turns to have more merit, rather than less, and to have more force in modifying the normative context than his own turns do.

To distil this picture of listening: *A poor listener* puts extra, unnecessary, and unwarranted burdens on a speaker to clarify, repair, and follow up in order to achieve their aims. To get their meaning across, the speaker is made to do most or all of the conversational 'work', with little to no support from the other party. The poor listener frustrates the aims of the speaker and undermines the efficiency of the conversation. *A good listener* reduces the speaker's conversational burden to a minimum, using best-fitted second pair parts to support the speaker in achieving her aims with maximum efficiency. The good listener does her own conversational work rather than putting it on the speaker.

Table 4

INTER-TURN: Conversation Analysis		
Infra-doings	Breaching	Normativity
A respondent recognises the aims of the speaker's turns; completes adjacent pair structures with appropriately fitted second pair parts.	A respondent utilises second pair parts which structurally fit but are unhelpful for achieving the speaker's aims, putting an extra burden on the speaker to advance conversation through extra, unnecessary turn pairs.	A respondent recognises the overall aims of speaker beyond the individual turns, and replies with best fitted second pair parts, obviating need for extra pairs and alleviating the burden on the speaker to advance the conversation.

2. Intra-Turn Structure (IL)

We turn now to a more extended form of conversation than the functional exchanges of ordinary talk. This register is perhaps more apt for what we usually have in mind when we talk about good and bad listeners. This register is where we have people telling their stories, explaining their thoughts, and sharing their

feelings in extended conversational turns. A good listener, such as a skilled therapist or kind boss, might be someone who says ‘mmhmm’ in all the right places, does not cut off the speaker’s turn prematurely, and generally ‘gets it’. When we try to become good listeners we might think about tips and tricks for getting those ‘mmhmms’ in the right places, for example. These are fair enough approximations of what good listening behaviour might look like on the surface within the scope of an extended turn, but it is a partial picture at best.

As noted in Section 1, it is a myth that the turn taking units of conversation require processing time, being sequentially ordered with gaps and ‘uhms’ in between turns. We listen and respond at the same time, often overlapping turns and communicating our responsiveness even while the other person is still speaking. To be sure, there are ways of getting this sort of thing wrong, in which case one is taken to be interrupting or cutting off the speaker’s turn, and we actively sanction this sort of behaviour. But despite the familiarity of the picture, it is not the case that conversation is a single channel in which only one signal at a time is transmitted, in only one direction.

Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson refer to this monadic view as the Classical model of conversation, in which ‘there is only a one-way channel from sender to receiver at any given moment; the receiver has no way to respond until he or she becomes the sender and takes over the channel.’²⁴¹ Schober and Clark contrast this *autonomous view* of conversation with their *collaborative view*, according to which addressees play an active role together with speakers in conducting the progress of conversation.²⁴² The benefit of the autonomous models is that they allow analysts to focus on the speech signal as a free-standing structure, eliminating much of the interfering complexity that would make our linguistic models even more complicated. However, if these views were right, there would be no such thing as getting all the ‘mmhmms’ in the right places.

²⁴¹ Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson, ‘Listeners as Co-Narrators’, 941.

²⁴² Michael F Schober and Herbert H Clark, ‘Understanding by Addressees and Overhearers’, *Cognitive Psychology* 21, no. 2 (1 April 1989): 211–32, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285\(89\)90008-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(89)90008-X).

The strange narrowness of these monadic views was noted as early as 1970, when Victor Yngve observed:

[T]he distinction between having the turn or not is not the same as the traditional distinction between speaker and listener, for it is possible to speak out of turn, and it is even reasonably frequent that a conversationalist speaks out of turn. In fact, both the person who has the turn and [his or her] partner are simultaneously engaged in both speaking and listening. This is because of the existence of what I call the back channel, over which the person who has the turn receives short messages such as “yes” and “uh-huh” without relinquishing the turn.²⁴³

As Yngve rightly points out, we do frequently speak while listening, and we listen while speaking. This is not an observation about turn interruption but about how turns, especially extended turns, are structured in the first place. While the speaker occupies the main channel with an extended turn, the listener feeds back indications of comprehension, sympathy, and dubiousness from the back channel. It is only if these bits of feedback become so obtrusive as to force the speaker to relinquish the turn that they constitute an interruption. The problem with speaking whilst being spoken to arises not whenever the listener issues any sort of communication at all, but rather when the listener starts issuing communication over the main channel, taking over the turn, instead of giving support and feedback via the back channel.

The studies done by Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson bring this collaborative dynamic into focus. They divide back channel responses into two types, generic and specific.²⁴⁴ Generic back channel responses are the sort of thing that are not specific to the content of the speaker’s narrative but could be used in virtually any situation, as if to signal that the listener is still attending the speaker’s turn and getting the speech signal okay. Generic responses include things like nodding and vocalizations (those ‘mmhms’). Specific responses are based on the content of the narrative itself, enabling the listener to show not just continued reception of

²⁴³ Yngve, ‘On Getting a Word in Edgewise.’, 568.

²⁴⁴ Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson, ‘Listeners as Co-Narrators’, 943–44.

the signal but increasing understanding of the signal. Specific responses include motor and affect mimicry (making faces and gestures to echo those of the speaker), illustrative hand gestures (such as might show how the listener is visualising the content of the narrative, for instance), and brief verbal interjections, such as helpfully supplying descriptive words or even finishing sentences simultaneously with the speaker to indicate understanding.

The studies in question measured the rate of occurrence of these different kinds of back channel responses over the course of a narrative under various experimental conditions. One subject would recount a story from their own life experience of a close call, risky situation. The other subject would be assigned to listen to the story under various experimental conditions, from just listening, to listening with the aim of being able to retell, to listening whilst doing distracting mental maths. Normally, one would expect the listener to make generic responses at the start of the narrative and then begin making increasingly specific responses as the story unfolded. The experimental conditions were intended to change the kind of attention listeners could pay to the unfolding narrative. Unsurprisingly, the more distracted a listener was by the mental maths, the less capable they were of generating specific back channel responses.

2.1 Infra-Doings

To get a picture of what competence looks like in this register, we look at how the respondent patterns her back channel responses. In short, the basic job of the respondent is to maintain continued attention to the content of the main channel, and signal understanding via the back channel, moving from generic to specific responses as appropriate, without usurping the main channel or cutting off the speaker's turn. As with the inter-turn infra-doings, competence looks like supporting the speaker in achieving their aims, but this time instead of having well-fitted second pair parts in an alternating sequence of turns, the listener has well-fitted back channel responses occurring at well-fitting points over the course of the speaker's extended turn. The back channel responses indicate continuing

attention, comprehension, and a willingness to affiliate with the content and meaning of what the speaker is conveying.

Early specific responses recorded by Bavelas et al. include listener's making facial displays of concern, when concerning situations are described, or facial displays of fear, when the speaker describes feeling afraid.²⁴⁵ The correspondence between the affect described by the speaker and the affect displayed by the listener is what we refer to as affiliation.²⁴⁶ Note that this does not mean that the listener *feels* what is being described, although this may occur in a particularly vivid retelling or when a story is told by someone for whom the listener cares a great deal. Rather, the listener is displaying a signal of the kind of affect described, in order to signal that they have, on some level, a willingness to take the same evaluative stance toward the situation as the speaker: to *affiliate* with the speaker.

Towards the end of the narrative, specific responses become increasingly complex and involved. Take this excerpt from one of the experimental scenarios describing a close call situation:

Example 5

Narrator: I, like an idiot, decide to climb up the cliff instead of...

Listener: ...going up the road

Narrator: ...taking the easy way out and going up the road.

The authors elaborate on this excerpt: 'Here, the listener actually provided a phrase that fit the narrator's main point, which was that it was foolish to try to escape rising water by going up the nearby cliff when there had been a better option. Moreover, he did so in a way that exactly fit the narrator's syntax, and the narrator immediately incorporated the listener's interjection into the narrative.'²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson, 943.

²⁴⁶ Tanya Stivers, 'Stance, Alignment, and Affiliation During Storytelling: When Nodding Is a Token of Affiliation', *Research on Language & Social Interaction* 41, no. 1 (11 March 2008): 31–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08351810701691123>.

²⁴⁷ Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson, 'Listeners as Co-Narrators', 944.

The interjection from the listener does not elicit the sort of response which would indicate the narrator felt interrupted. Rather, the narrator's extended turn carries on undisrupted. The words from the listener do not take over the main channel. The words come via the back channel and serve to participate, even collaborate in the speaker's ongoing turn. The response is highly specific to the exact content of that point in the narrative. They show an affiliative response, in that they are suited to the speaker's evaluative stance towards what they are telling, and they further show that the listener has absorbed sufficient details from the story thus far to understand what the layout of the scene was, what the options were, and what could have happened instead. This is a highly involved listener.

These kinds of specific responses are not possible to produce without paying sufficiently close attention, as the other experimental conditions indicate. Listeners who are busy doing things like counting verbs or attempting mental maths do not absorb details about the scene setting, the availability of a road one could go up, and so on. The more distracted a listener is, the more they stick with generic responses, the loose 'uh-huh' tokens which indicate little more than 'I am still here and am aware that you are still speaking'. Particularly as the narratives advance toward the climax of the risky situation, and situations of threat toward which the speakers take vivid evaluative stances, bland tokens of 'uh-huh' do not convey willingness or ability to affiliate with the content and meaning of what the speaker is saying, nor even a basic comprehension of the story so far. Persistently generic responses around the climax of a close call story would tend to be read as indicative of something, much like the inapt responses of Garfinkel's breachers.

Depending on context, the speaker may assume that the lack of appropriate and affiliative, specific back channel responses indicates either that the listener is very distracted and not taking in the content, or that the listener is unwilling to affiliate with the content. The latter might occur if, say, a person known for exaggeration tells a story of being in a perceived threatening situation which the listener assumes was not really threatening at all. The listener's 'uh-huh' sounds blank, rather than affiliative, or even may begin to sound like a sarcastic

confirmation, indicating that whilst they entirely understand what the speaker is saying, they are not willing to share the speaker's evaluative stance and affiliate with the interpretation of the situation as threatening.

Table 5

INTRA-TURN: Interactional Linguistics		
Infra-doings	Breaching	Normativity
A respondent provides appropriate generic & specific back channel responses, uptaking speaker's meanings without interrupting or usurping the turn.		

2.2 Breaching

If the point of the back channel is that it allows the listener to communicate feedback to the speaker without causing the speaker to relinquish her turn, then we would expect that breaching in this register would take the form of either withholding the needed feedback or responding in an intrusive manner that causes the speaker to relinquish her turn. Both forms of breach can occur for reasons varying from polite and acceptable to rude or hostile. The commonality across cases is that the breaches present interference from the listener, prompting the speaker to renegotiate the way she is conducting her turn.

Suppose Katy, who is not a philosopher, asks me what I am writing about. I launch into an in depth explanation of the pieces I'm currently writing. Katy is usually supportive and curious about my work, but suppose that in this case my enthusiasm takes over and I become far more long winded than I should. As I carry on about my projects, she becomes bored and wishes I would wrap it up. When I first started telling her about my work, she gave some generic back channel responses, to indicate basic understanding. Occasionally she may have given a slightly more intrusive indication of confusion, especially when I use jargon. She doesn't really cause me to relinquish the turn, just indicates through confused-face and a 'What?' that I need to explain something. As I elaborate, she is able to

make increasingly specific responses, demonstrating that she gets the point and is tracking.

However, as she becomes bored with my excessive telling, she starts looking for a way to encourage me to finish my telling. She could start withholding all back channel responses, 'going quiet on the line', in order to stop encouraging me forward with my telling. Bavelas et al. note that this level of back channel drag has the effect of significantly undermining the *quality* of a narrator's telling. Especially when a narrator passes the climax of the story with no appropriate recognition from the listener, the telling suddenly becomes choppy where it had been fluid, limping awkwardly to a poor ending.²⁴⁸ If this happens due to some distraction in the environment, it is not especially likely to give rise to hostility, but if it happens due to an intentional withholding of back channel support, the speaker is likely to interpret this move by the listener as a general, personally-directed lack of supportiveness or what I call 'mutinous silence'. Whether this interpretation is correct or not, the breaching pattern interrupts the flow of conversation and requires repair manoeuvres from the participants in order to set things back to rights.

Intrusive responses most obviously include blatant interruption, but even this type of breach is not necessarily rude. Suppose Katy says, 'Sorry to cut you off; I'm going to need to go in a minute. So can I just check that I have this right? What you're saying is that...' This case typifies Stokoe's point that I made above: deviation from a pattern is not usually the end of discourse, but a way of continuing the discourse in a manner that meaningfully alters its course. This intrusive response is politely done; she apologises, gives a reason for cutting me off, and suggests a continuing interest in my work in general (albeit perhaps not in so much detail), which implies an affiliative stance despite the temporal constraints.

²⁴⁸ Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson, 949.

Other forms of intrusive responses introduce dissonance from the back channel by using specific but inappropriate feedback to muddle the speaker's turn. Ordinarily, specific back channel responses serve as an efficient way for the listener to signal that they understand both *what* the speaker is saying, and what the speaker is saying *about* the content. If the speaker is telling me something sad and I start giggling, there is dissonance. If the speaker is telling me something joyful and I wear a look of pity and sad compassion, she might stop and ask why. A listener is of course not required to fully mirror the speaker's affect, to feel likewise, or to agree with the speaker's perspective on whatever is being narrated; furthermore, a dissonant response could result from unrelated events in the environment. I might say, 'I'm sorry, at the table behind you there is a small child who just exploded into the saddest tears ever. My attention is back on you now; you were saying...' One such event is not likely to enact a breach, but if I were to show this level of distractibility persistently and repeatedly, the speaker might interpret them to imply that I am not interested in participating collaboratively in whatever story she is telling, and she becomes frustrated.

The more substantially inappropriate my back channel contributions are, the more likely the narrator is to interpret me as breaching the basic expectations that storytellers have of their audiences—expectations which may be greater or lesser, depending on the contextual factors such as the relationship between us, the occasion of the telling, the kind of attention she asked for, and so on. Say she had told me she was having a really hard time and asked if she could tell me about it. Then I start giggling at things in the environment and reacting to things disconnected to what she is telling me. My response is not only disaffiliative; it is out of step with the kind of attention I presumably agreed to give. Once again, we note that such situations are not rigid; a disaffiliative response well handled could serve to help someone find the humour in an unfortunate situation. But persistent, obstinate refusal to affiliate with anything a speaker says can have a cumulative effect. Since an affiliative response does not entail agreement with the speaker's evaluative stance, but only acknowledgement of their stance, persistent

refusal to affiliate might imply that the speaker's perspective is somehow incomprehensible, incoherent, or utterly unrelatable.

Table 6

INTRA-TURN: Interactional Linguistics		
Infra-doings	Breaching	Normativity
A respondent provides appropriate generic & specific back channel responses, uptaking speaker's meanings without interrupting or usurping the turn.	A respondent's back channel responses are withheld, inappropriate, intrusive, or disaffiliative; it becomes laborious for speaker to complete their turn.	

2.3 Inferring Normativity

As always, the wider discursive context must be considered if we are to get an accurate reading of the moral stakes revealed by breaches that are 'crossing the line'. When looking at extended narrative turns, the particulars of the scenario we imagine will have much to do with how ready we are to suppose that any back channel infra-doings are normatively owed to speakers. It is in our closest personal relationships that we may be inclined to recognise the greatest—and paradoxically, also the least—obligation to be an involved listener who collaborates and affiliates via the back channel. We are also likely to imagine the obligations of the listener to be greater when we imagine ourselves as the tellers, whilst being jealous of our entitlement as listeners to choose when we collaborate with a speaker what they are saying. This variation is to be expected, and within the Discourse Ecology Model, it does not pose a problem. *Of course* the context matters for determining the scope and scale of the normative stakes.

As before, we want to consider a range of scenarios in order to get at the underlying moral dynamic, and in this case, that means we need to look at scenarios which vary from the experimental cases of Bavelas and her team in two ways. They had participants tell close call stories from their *own* lives, to interlocutors to whom they had not particular personal relationship. This means that there was a minimal role played by contextual factors like the social

relationship between teller and listener, the power differences between them, and the epistemological reflex to question the veracity of things. In the experimental conditions, tellers could largely be trusted to know their own life stories, and the listener had no grounds to dispute the veracity; no power dynamic to leverage for or against the speaker, and no obligations of friendship, just the obligations incurred from the experimenter's instructions. To see these things in play, we look first at a fictional scenario where personal attachments do apply, and then at a scenario where political disparities and epistemic contentiousness come in.

First, the personal attachments scenario: Kirk tells his good friend Luke about a time he nearly died. Kirk was driving across the Rocky Mountains on I-70²⁴⁹ one snowy winter, and a sudden pile up caused by a drunk driver in front of him left him with no room to divert or slow down. Kirk's car was smashed into half its original length as it was hit from in front and behind. When everything stopped crashing and sliding around, Kirk's bumper was hanging off the edge of the road, where it curved around a drop-off into a deep valley. One car had already fallen off the edge, killing whoever was inside, but Kirk was lucky. Now, given that Kirk is telling Luke the story, it is evident that Kirk survived. Naturally, Kirk's fear in the moment will have had a different feel and intensity to what Luke feels on hearing the story of his friend's life having been in danger.

Consider then the difference between two contextual variations on this scenario:

V1: It is later the same day. Kirk has called Luke to come pick him up and take him home. Luke has just arrived, and Kirk is still rattled and shaking.

V2: It is ten years later. Luke did not know Kirk at the time of the accident, and they are comparing tales of disastrous events they've faced throughout their lives.

²⁴⁹ I-70 is the name of a winding motorway stretching Westwards from Denver, Colorado. Although it is often dangerous to drive this route in wintry conditions, it is also notoriously busy in winter, as it is the main route of travel to and from the busy ski resorts.

Let us assume that, in both versions, Luke knows Kirk well. So in V2, Luke would know a Kirk who has already fought through the trauma and the strangeness of survivor's guilt. He doesn't have nightmares anymore about the screams of people falling off cliffs, and he's reasonably comfortable driving mountain roads in wintry conditions again. Kirk is fine now, and it is *important* that he is fine.

Think how cold Luke would seem in V1, if he shows up to collect a shaking, frightened Kirk and his reaction to hearing Kirk's recounting is an emotionless shrug. 'Whatever dude, you obviously survived to tell the tale so why should I *pretend* to be afraid for you?' What we might expect of Luke as a listener is that he give appropriate back channel feedback to Kirk's telling, and this includes not just the danger Kirk is reporting but what Kirk is conveying about his affective stance in relation to the danger. Luke's task is not just to digest the content of the narrative, but to assess its significance to Kirk in the moment and respond to the rattled state of his friend.²⁵⁰ Even a first responder, a paramedic, or a stranger standing by would seem cold to give the above response.

By contrast, in V2, Kirk is telling the story in a calm, stoic fashion. He is okay now, after all he went through. But as he tells the story, Luke starts falling apart. He appears rattled and shaken, his face white with terror as he imagines his friend's close call with death. It is appropriate for Luke to signal from the back channel that he grasps how frightening and dangerous the incident must have been, but there is a kind of dissonance between the raw fear Luke seems to signal and the calm with which Kirk tells the story. We might imagine Kirk reacting to Luke's reaction: 'I've fought so hard to recover from the trauma of this, and seeing you fall apart when *obviously* I'm standing here alive and settled is a reopening of the wound that I just don't need. Pull yourself together, man!'²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ This example gestures towards the difference between listening to an *utterance* and listening to a *person*.

²⁵¹ An exception: if Kirk tells his story and Luke bursts into tears because, unbeknownst to Kirk, Luke's father recently died in a similar accident, then surely Luke has in no way shirked his responsibilities as listener. It may, however, take a few extra conversational turns for the two to sort out what has led to the mismatch in reactions, before the dissonance is resolved. My thanks to David Faraci for raising this point.

Luke's reaction in the second case indicates that he has clearly understood the narrative, grasped what Kirk is saying, and in some way is showing a responsiveness that seems affiliative. There is no problem of comprehension, and yet the reaction is not what would have been appropriate. Luke's reaction fails to appropriately match what the speaker is conveying in terms of what the content means to the speaker. This might seem an odd place to focus, but I think it points us to the essential pivot on which good listening turns. Luke's reactions are ill-fitting because they are responding to what *he* is feeling about the narrative, rather than to Kirk's telling of the narrative itself. Luke is ticking the boxes of a competent listener's infra-doings, but it takes a *good* listener to be able to keep separate the story as told by, experienced by, and assessed by the speaker, and the story as it affects the listener. A good listener performs their collaborative, back channel role of supporting the speaker in communicating their narrative turn, including what the content of the narrative means to the speaker, without getting distracted by what the turn means for them—the listener—as an individual. This is arguably part of the special skill set developed by therapists, who routinely need to be able to supportively listen to narratives of things outside their own experience, including narratives of painful, traumatic events, and give adequate back channel responses without their own affective reactions intruding.²⁵²

A particularly poor listener, by contrast, would produce a magnified version of Luke's ill-fitting responses. A poor listener would be someone who, in giving back channel responses, fails to accomplish things like affect mimicry, and can *only* give affective responses based on their own perspectival standpoint. For example, suppose Kirk tells Luke that everyone at his workplace will be participating in a 10k run for charity campaigning against drunk driving. Kirk *loves* running. Luke *hates* running. On hearing this news, Luke groans loudly and expresses sympathy and condolences to Kirk. This is absurd: he should be happy for Kirk, because Kirk gets to do something that Kirk loves to do. Luke's dislike of

²⁵² In *The Virtuous Psychiatrist*, Radden and Sadler view the special skill set as including a virtue they call 'unselfing', which 'refers to the personally effaced yet acutely attentive and affectively attuned toward the patient, the relationship, and its boundaries' Radden and Sadler, *The Virtuous Psychiatrist*, 132.

running has nothing to do with the conversation. This example is silly, but I think it helps to pinpoint through its absurdity the pivotal difference between good listening and poor listening: namely, an ability to keep sorted one's own perspectives, values, and desires from those of the speaker. How self-absorbed must Luke be to give this particular reaction to Kirk's news?

The matter does not seem silly, however, if we shift to a context where the interlocutors are not on an equal footing with each other. Once again we can analyse Jimmy's game of whack-a-mole through the lens of intra-turn infra-doings. Suppose Jimmy knows that a decent listener should at least 'shut up', in Medina's terms, long enough to let Gina get a few points out and sketch the relevant connections between them. While Gina speaks, Jimmy tries not to play whack-a-mole in his head. He tries not to walk the line too ambiguously between a genuine-sounding and sarcastic-sounding 'uh-huh... sure...'. Now, instead of paying attention to Gina's eyebrow and the set of her jaw, he is paying very close attention to the intonation of his generic back channel responses and the tension at the sides of his mouth. Is he implying an affiliative or disaffiliative stance? He is still reluctant to agree with Gina's evaluation of how things stand in the district, but how much does his new commitment to being a good listener require him to go along with what Gina says?

Were we to counsel Jimmy through this stage of learning to listen, we might remind him of two things. First, we would remind him that an affiliative response need not signal that the listener agrees with and feels the same way as the speaker. No, an affiliative response shows first and foremost that the listener has understood what the speaker's evaluative stance is, and shows that the listener has a handle on what it is about the content of the turn that is *important to the speaker*. Just as Luke should be able keep track of the difference between his feelings about running or about the accident and Kirk's feelings, Jimmy should be able to tell the difference between his feelings about Gina's message (a feeling of reactive hostility) and the stance Gina portrays about her own stance. If he does

not keep these separate, then he is likely to interpret everything Gina says as hostile and aimed at undermining him.

But if he can track that these are *his* feelings based on *his* evaluative stance, and can hold those to one side while Gina speaks, then he opens up space to notice that Gina is actually quite friendly towards him, and she wants him to succeed. She just also wants blue students to be well supported in their district. A good way to test this is to see what happens when Jimmy tries offering those specific back channel responses. If he supplies a clause via the back channel, collaborating with Gina in her turn, and that clause is closely aligned with what she is saying, her eyes will light up, and she will take his words and incorporate them. If the clause he supplies is dissonant with what she is saying, then every time he tries to help complete a sentence she will stop and say ‘no, it’s not that.’ Her flow will be disrupted and she will grow increasingly frustrated, as his out-of-sync responses indicate that he is not grasping what *she* is saying is important about their discussion.

Since the two have a long history of misunderstanding, the first time that he puts his defensiveness aside long enough to hear what she’s saying will likely produce quite a reaction from Gina, a sense that finally, they are getting through to each other! But again, the power differential between Jimmy and Gina means that Jimmy has extra responsibility here. The clauses he supplies via the back channel as specific responses can do more than just annoy Gina by putting words in her mouth; they can overwrite what she is saying, blocking her from completing certain utterances in the way she aims to, or from making the point that she is trying to develop over her extended turn—and this has real implications, once again, not just for Gina but for the wider community of blue families. The stakes are high, so if Jimmy can focus on the infra-doing of supplying back channel responses which most accurately participate in the unfolding of Gina’s turn and in saying what Gina is trying to say, then the moral and political payoff stands to be quite significant.

Table 7

INTRA-TURN: Interactional Linguistics		
Infra-doings	Breaching	Normativity
A respondent provides appropriate generic & specific back channel responses, uptaking speaker's meanings without interrupting or usurping the turn.	A respondent's back channel responses are withheld, inappropriate, intrusive, or disaffiliative; it becomes laborious for speaker to complete their turn.	A respondent provides supportive & specific back channel responses, interpreting content as speaker tells it, minimising the burden of effort for speaker to complete turn.

3. Meta-Turn Structure (Pragmatics 2.0)

Within Conversation Analysis studies, we find discussions of what they call *epistemics*. While epistemologists tend to be concerned with exploring when and how we come to know things, and how to test the *actual validity* of knowledge claims, the focus of epistemics is on the way that people in conversation negotiate their claims to knowledge, with respect to each other.²⁵³ This is a sociological viewpoint: the lens is focussed on what people tend to do, and the patterned behaviours they use to do it, rather than on what ideal knowers *ought* to do.

In her Presidential Address to the APA Central Division in 2019, Jennifer Nagel picks up the literature on epistemics to look at how we negotiate with each other (*we the people*, not *we the philosophers*) around knowledge claims in conversation. She notes, 'Philosophers may be more accustomed to working with ideas from Grice (1975) or Stalnaker (2002) in this general area; however, there is value in picking up a somewhat different, if often overlapping, set of theoretical tools, and in exploring data that may be novel to at least some of us.'²⁵⁴ Nagel traces the significance of epistemics as arising from the cooperativity which underpins

²⁵³ See, for example, Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig, *The Morality of Knowledge in Conversation*.

²⁵⁴ Jennifer Nagel, 'Epistemic Territory' (Presidential Address, APA Central Division, Denver, CO, 22 February 2019), 2.

communication itself—an idea familiar in philosophy as well as language studies.²⁵⁵

Nagel notes that, as a species of cooperative beings, our conversation serves to pool and refine knowledge, relying on a ‘social division of epistemic labour’ which, in order to work, requires us to be able to track, evaluate, and keep up to date on who has domain over any given epistemic territory.²⁵⁶ This idea works beautifully in an ecological framework: we have a shared world, shared linguistic resources for communicating about it, and shared accumulation of knowledge about our world. We do not all have equal claims to expertise on all things. I am more at home in the epistemic territories of philosophy, music, food, and Colorado geography than I am in the epistemic territories of actuarial maths, sculpture, baseball statistics, or oceanic weather patterns. None of the above are things which are *my* territory, per se, in the way that medical expertise is the territory of the NHS and the CDC, but they are territories where I am familiar and at home. Part of the context important for understanding the social, moral, and political dynamics between speakers in a conversation is the extent to which the conversation covers epistemic territories where one or the other has dominance.

In epistemics, the conversation analyst looks at some of the tokens we use to negotiate epistemic territories. For example, ‘Oh!’ marks a change of state from not knowing to knowing, in the following case. I tell my niece that a pub we are going to has very good, very fluffy chips. She is incredulous. Fluffy chips? Since when can chips be fluffy? I note that she is thinking of what Americans call chips (UK: crisps), whereas I’m referring to that triple-fried wonder of an upgrade on

²⁵⁵ Margaret Gilbert and Maura Priest, ‘Conversation and Collective Belief’, in *Perspectives on Pragmatics and Philosophy*, ed. Alessandro Capone, Franco Lo Piparo, and Marco Carapezza, vol. 1, Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy & Psychology (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2013), 1–34, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01011-3_1; Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*; Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*; McKinney, ‘Communication, Labor, and Communicative Labor’.

²⁵⁶ Nagel, ‘Epistemic Territory’, 10. The notion of epistemic territories is derived from Akio Kamio’s work on ‘territories of information’; see Akio Kamio, *Territory of Information*, Pragmatics & Beyond, N.S., 48 (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1997).

the humble fry. ‘Oh, I see! I did not realise that chips are actually something else in the UK.’ She uses the ‘Oh!’ token to mark her transition from being confused to knowing what I’m talking about. In so doing, she acknowledges my claim as having given her knowledge about a regional, potato-based food.

A similar function is played by ‘Actually!’ . This token is used when someone imparts knowledge in a territory in which they take themselves to have primacy, but the listener takes themselves to have a superior claim to knowledge. For example, I mention to my niece at the pub that *classic* chips are not vegetarian, as they are fried in duck fat. ‘*Actually,*’ replies the waiter, ‘they are classically fried in beef dripping.’ The ‘Actually!’ token is a signal that recognises what I am saying and what I mean, but, as one with better knowledge of the subject matter, he has information with which to gainsay me.

Similarly, ‘Of course!’ can function to contest the askability of something.²⁵⁷ If someone asks me, ‘Did you cite Miranda Fricker in your paper on listening to people?’ I might reply, ‘*Of course!* I always cite her in everything I do; after all, she said back in 2007 that to rectify epistemic injustice it might help if we are virtuous hearers.’²⁵⁸ The reply implies that the asker should have known the information, that the information was not really up for questioning. More precisely, my reply indicates that the asker should have known this *about me*, that I am aware of this important piece of work and that I have responsible citation practices. The claim that the question was not really up for questioning might in some cases imply that this is not an epistemic territory where I am out of my depth, but in this case, it implies that the asker herself should know the epistemic territory (namely, me and my citation practices) better than her question indicates.

²⁵⁷ Tanya Stivers, ‘Morality and Question Design: “Of Course” as Contesting a Presupposition of Askability’, in *The Morality of Knowledge in Conversation*, ed. Tanya Stivers, Lorenza Mondada, and Jakob Steensig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 82–106, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511921674.003>.

²⁵⁸ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 169.

In order to effectively navigate our world, we collaborate and share knowledge, which requires us to keep track of which things are commonly known, which are up for question, which are only known to some parties, and so on. The knowledge which must be kept track of is not just the facts-first or function-first knowledge of epistemology and instrumental know-how, but also the interpersonal knowledge of mutual acquaintance, character, and the shared histories which are an important feature of building trust. Even at our most competitive, even when Supreme Court Justices debate the most contentious questions of the decade, our conversational practices presuppose this collaborative backdrop, for if we were not trying to pool information and understanding about our shared world, we would not share our views in the first place, nor contest them against each other.

3.1 Infra-Doings

To understand the infra-doings of the listener at the meta-turn level, we begin looking at what interlocutors do with knowledge claims and negotiations of epistemic territory. The purpose of starting here is to pick up the notion of a common ground. In using this term, I am appropriating a term which has various meanings both in its colloquial usage and as a term of art. This is important to flag up at the outset, because various technical literatures use terminology of ‘common ground’, ‘common knowledge’, and similar, and they use these terms in differing and sometimes conflicting ways. For example, sociolinguist Herb Clark uses the term to cover a range of meanings, from those that pick out ethnographic claims about what is shared, culturally encoded knowledge, to things that are counted as common ground in a specific conversation because we have already said those things and are agreeing to take them as given.²⁵⁹

In formal pragmatics, the term ‘common ground’ refers to what we all know. This includes things *that we all know* that we all know. Also included are things that we know we are *taking to be* under consideration because it is a thing *some other* person thinks. Even if some discourse participants take themselves to

²⁵⁹ Herbert H. Clark, *Using Language* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

know something is not true, they still represent it in the common ground as a belief they have to navigate around (in this conversation, with these people, at least). Exactly how the pragmatician frames the status of contested claims with respect to their model of the common ground depends on their particular theory and model of the conversational scoreboard, which we need not explore in detail here.²⁶⁰ Both these uses differ from the logician's idea of what is common knowledge and from a broad idea of what is common sense, or what is familiar enough knowledge that it need not be cited, such as this claim. Instead, using what we have learned from EMCA and IL so far and the resources of the Discourse Ecology Model, I will build out my own technical notion of Common Ground in conversation. Wherever I refer to my own notion of the Common Ground, it is capitalised.

To begin, however, we look at how the idea of a Common Ground figures in a classic case from formal pragmatics, in which Stalnaker illustrates the state of 'common knowledge' in the case of a fictional murder mystery story, which he calls the whodunit case. I quote at length:

There are just three possible suspects for the murder—the butler, the gardener, and the chauffeur—and it is common knowledge that whoever did it acted alone. Alice was with the gardener at the time of the murder (although she is reluctant to reveal this fact), so she is absolutely certain that he is innocent. Bert has conclusive evidence that rules out the chauffeur, which he has shared with Alice, so it is common knowledge between Alice and Bert that either the butler or the gardener did it. Alice concludes that since it wasn't the gardener, it must have been the butler. But Bert has what is in fact misleading evidence that he takes to exonerate the butler, so he infers that it must have been the gardener. Alice and Bert each tell the other who he or she believes was the guilty party, but neither is convinced by the other. Alice, in particular, is far more certain of the innocence of the gardener than she is of the guilt of the butler. Were she to learn, to her surprise, that the butler was innocent, she would conclude that the

²⁶⁰ But for examples, see Lewis, 'Scorekeeping in a Language Game'; Stalnaker, *Context and Content*; Stalnaker, *Context*; Roberts, 'Information Structure in Discourse'; Habgood-Coote, 'Group Inquiry'.

chauffeur's alibi must not be as good as it looks, and that he must be the guilty party. But that won't happen, since in fact, the butler did it.

Bert says, "We disagree about who did it, but we agree—it is common knowledge between us—that either the butler or the gardener did it, and each possibility is compatible with our common knowledge. So even though you are convinced that the butler is the guilty party, you should agree that if the butler didn't do it, the gardener did. ...

Alice agrees that it is common knowledge that either the butler or the gardener did it, and that each of these two possibilities is compatible with their common knowledge. But she will be reluctant to accept the conditional, which conflicts with her conditional belief—perhaps with her conditional knowledge—that even if the butler didn't do it, the guilty party is still not the gardener.²⁶¹

The example is designed for reflection on the epistemic status of modal claims, such as how Alice evaluates the claim that it *could have been* someone she knows did not do it. What we want out of this example, however, is to look at what conversational behaviours arise in how Alice and Bert negotiate their disagreement, and how they navigate their respective epistemic territories, which differ (at least in Alice's case) from what is included in the conversational Common Ground.

We see that each of them has some bits of information which they take to be knowledge. For the most part, when Bert tells Alice he has an alibi from the butler or chauffeur, she takes his claim to be knowledge—which is now common to both of them—and it is added to the Common Ground. There is also some knowledge that Alice has regarding the gardener, but because she does not share it, it does not become part of the Common Ground. Thus, she accurately takes Bert to *not know* what she knows about the gardener, and she cannot blame Bert for not knowing what she knows. It is important for her interests that she preserves this disconnection between what she knows and what gets added to the Common Ground. Now suppose Bert secretly knew about Alice and the gardener. Bert knows about Alice's knowledge, but neither of their knowledges gets added to the

²⁶¹ Stalnaker, *Context*, 163–64.

conversational Common Ground, until something in the course of the conversation suggests, implies, or otherwise gives away the fact that something is being held back, and the secret information gets *acknowledged* into the Common Ground.

To acknowledge something, colloquially, does not necessarily mean to agree with it. If Bert dislikes the gardener, Alice may acknowledge Bert's dislike, without sharing it. Likewise, she can acknowledge Bert's state of 'knowledge' about the whodunit case, without having the same view about the epistemic status of all the elements of Bert's understanding. We are going to be looking here at what is done *in conversation* with acknowledged divergences, so we will leave Stalnaker and friends to puzzle over the metaphysical truth status of claims.

We want to take a stance closer to that of epistemics, where we look at how two interlocutors handle partially overlapping epistemic territories, but conflicting claims therein. These epistemically divergent, contradictory positions are taken up in conversation when the participants hold and are expressing discrepant views of the world, which sociologist Melvin Pollner calls 'reality disjunctures'.²⁶² That is to say, on Pollner's view, the way we manage knowledge discrepancies involves juggling two or more different pictures of how reality is. Where the epistemologist's main order of business is to figure out how to adjudicate and settle between differing accounts of reality, the sociologist's aim is to look at how differing accounts of reality diverge, and why, and what people tend to do about it. He is, in short, looking at the infra-doings of how we handle knowledge discrepancies. If such a discrepancy occurs within an epistemic territory in which both interlocutors have parity, then the discrepancy may stand while the matter is under consideration. If a discrepancy occurs within an epistemic territory in which one interlocutor is considered to have significant

²⁶² Melvin Pollner, "The Very Coinage of Your Brain": The Anatomy of Reality Disjunctures', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 5, no. 3 (1 September 1975): 411–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004839317500500304>; Melvin Pollner, *Mundane Reason: Reality in Everyday and Sociological Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Mondada, 'The Management of Knowledge Discrepancies and of Epistemic Changes in Institutional Interactions'.

primacy, the other person may be expected to relinquish their view rather than insist that it remain in the Common Ground as if it were a live possibility.

What I propose to do here is to work with an expansive picture of a conversational Common Ground, which should include not just what we know and take each other to know, and our beliefs about reality and modality, but also a whole host of normative and affective considerations. Recalling the Scoreboard frame, on which we jointly deliberate over model possibilities, we can expect a Common Ground on most accounts to include:

- i. What Alice believes and knows
What Bert believes and knows
- ii. What Alice knows/believes Bert to know/believe
What Bert knows/believes Alice to know/believe
- iii. What Alice takes to be possibly the case, to be impossible, etc...
What Bert takes to be possible, impossible, etc...
- iv. What Alice takes Bert to think possible, etc...
What Bert takes Alice to think possible, etc...
- v. Alice's desires, projects, values, and preferences
- vi. Bert's desires, projects, values, and preferences
- vii. Alice's knowledge of Bert's desires, projects, values, preferences
- viii. Bert's knowledge of Alice's desires, projects, values, preferences²⁶³

To correctly navigate the Common Ground, Alice needs to be able to keep straight the difference between (i) what she knows about the gardener, and (ii) what Bert takes her to know about the gardener—which is to say, that he doesn't take her to know anything different to what he knows, since her knowledge has not been shared.

²⁶³ We can think of i-iv as dealing with epistemic and modal concerns, and things likely to be the object of the German verb *wissen*, whilst v-viii are dealing with value and affect concerns, and things likely to be the object of the verb *kennen*.

However, as soon as we leave the particularly epistemic subject matter of the whodunit case, we realise that to correctly navigate the Common Ground, Alice also needs to be able to avoid making errors like the error Luke made when Kirk announced his workplace 10k. Luke's error was to overlook (vi) his interlocutor's desires, projects, values, and preferences, and so he gives an affectively inappropriate response to Kirk's announcement. Kirk would be justified in being offended at this if he has rightly apprised that (vii) Luke has knowledge of Kirk's desires. Now, a traditional Common Ground model would include that participants know about each other's likes and dislikes, and this can be processed with value-claims (i.e., 'Running is fun!') that are disguised as epistemological claims about the value judgements of the interlocutors. The infra-doing in question is that Luke cross-checks the value of the statement about anticipated 10k participation with what is already in the Common Ground, which includes rich detail based on the shared history of friendship between Luke and Kirk, and all they have reason to know about each other.

Suppose that Kirk has run many races, in which Luke has cheered him on. Kirk would rightly find it strange that Luke responds to the announcement on the basis of his *own* desires rather than Kirk's. But perhaps it is the case that they are newer friends, and although Kirk tends to mention his running habit frequently, it just so happens not to have come up yet with conversation with Luke. Kirk might be offended at Luke's refusal to use his background knowledge to come up with a right reaction to the announcement of Kirk's 10k plans. When he calls Luke up on it, Luke says, 'What, really? You are a runner? I did not know that. I really hate running so that's my default reaction, but now that I know you love running, I'm excited for your sake!'

The sensible thing at this point is for Kirk to no longer be offended, but merely bemused that he'd somehow never mentioned this before—it had not made it into the Common Ground represented by the whole conversational record between them, so it gets added in now. Both Luke and Kirk update their appraisal of the Common Ground with regard to their own and each other's desires. In

future, when race related news arises, Kirk can express his position knowing that Luke will be able to process the comments with respect to the knowledge he has of Kirk's desires. Of course, if Luke were to pull a Garfinkel-style breaching experiment on Kirk in such a case, Kirk would be well justified in being outraged at Luke. They have already explicitly covered this topic; Luke *knows* Kirk likes running, so his refusal to make use of this background knowledge in responding to Kirk in conversation would be interpreted as some kind of hostility.

Table 8

META-CONVERSATIONAL: Common Ground Pragmatics		
Infra-doings	Breaching	Normativity
A respondent participates in negotiating territories of primacy, resolving modal differences, and tracking content of the Common Ground across conversational instances.		

3.2 Breaching

What should we say then about breaching behaviour with respect to the conversational Common Ground? Naturally, different constraints apply to the Common Ground when we are looking at things like truth, knowledge, and possibility in their strictest senses, than when we are looking at things like an individual person's desires, projects, values, and preferences. There is no contradiction entailed by including both 'Running, yay!' and 'Running, boo!' in the Common Ground, provided these are each indexed to Kirk and to Luke respectively.

But if there is a contradiction in what Bert believes to be possible (i.e., that it was the Gardener) and what Alice knows to be impossible, then there is a disjuncture in the Common Ground of the sort which we feel drives us to *resolve* the contradiction (especially *we the philosophers*). Note that even for the sleuth on the whodunit case, the Common Ground can sustain the contradiction; if people know each other to hold differing beliefs, then the Common Ground includes

those beliefs, each indexed to whoever holds it. But for as long as this disjuncture remains in the Common Ground, there will be a felt pressure to resolve the contradiction and get at the fact of the matter—a pressure that does not arise from the contradiction between Kirk and Luke’s views on running.²⁶⁴ The idea of a reality disjuncture is that when we have two competing pictures of the way reality is, and those pictures cannot both be true, then we have a disjunct, an ‘or’ between propositions, which must be settled before we can be sure of reality.

Such disjunctures bother us to a greater or lesser extent depending how existentially significant we find the subject matter. If the disjuncture is about how enjoyable running is (a personal preference), this is not existentially threatening. If this disjuncture is about whether Alice’s secret lover should go to prison on unwarranted charges of murder, the disjuncture is rather more pressing (involving epistemic facts of the matter). If the disjuncture is about whether a department is characterised as being a safe or a dangerous place to be a racial minority, the disjuncture picks out issues which are morally important to the pride of those affiliated with the department (rather significant), but it also picks out issues which are significant to the safety and wellbeing of members of staff who experience racial harassment or marginalisation in their work environment (both morally *and* existentially significant).

If we work with a Scoreboard frame to model the Common Ground, then we want open questions to be settled for the record, when possible. We should all want the murder solved, though we will not all attach as much significance to this as Alice and the gardener do. We may want to shift things in favour of our preferences, say, by attempting to share our love of certain hobbies with our sceptical friends. Unfortunately, the pressure to resolve the dispute about racism in the workplace would incline many to want the open question about their own moral standing to be resolved as quickly as possible. The department members do

²⁶⁴ Pollner, *Mundane Reason*, 77.

not want to look up at the scoreboard and see a question about whether they are guilty of complicity in racial harassment, marked as an open possibility.

They might contest the askability in the first place, '*Of course* I am not racist!' They might work out who specifically has been accused and say, '*Oh, that person* is accused of complicity in racial harassment, not me. That seems like an open possibility after all then.' But if they were to be told, '*Actually*, you were named as one of the problematic people,' then there is a worry of losing both moral good standing *and* of losing any pretensions they had to claiming epistemic primacy in the territory of who is upstanding in the department. The urge is to swiftly resolve the question by eliminating from the Common Ground the possibility that one is part of the problem. In the rush to show oneself not complicit in racial harassment, one risks being overly hasty in dismissing the claims of those who are already in the vulnerable position of being subject to such threats.

What is distinctive about the characterisation I am giving of the Common Ground, as a matter of epistemics, is that it has (once again) been designed to integrate the whole ecological context, involving who the interlocutors are, their socio-political context, the literal time-and-place context of the exchange (i.e., is it in public or in private), and more. We also are including, again, the normative context. The worried colleague who contests askability by using the *of course* token is contesting whether someone is entitled to investigate the option that the person may be guilty of complicity in racial harassment—because, of course, if so, then the person has an obligation to respond in some way to the charges. The colleague who wants to avoid such normative entanglement has a reason to want to eliminate certain possibilities from the scoreboard.

Breaches occur when the Common Ground is not modified in a way that is warranted by the turns taken in the conversation. When the complaint is made about racial harassment, the complaint should, in theory, go straight into the conversational Common Ground, as we have figured it here. It should go in as a complaint, as something which is more within the epistemic territory of some (those in a position to know) than of others, and if necessary, it can go in with all

sorts of indexing, to the agents who hold certain beliefs, to the agents have certain interests (i.e., safety, or being thought well of). If an interlocutor in a conversation refuses to acknowledge what a speaker is putting into the Common Ground or restricts the option on the form the Common Ground addition can take, we may have an instancing of refusal to listen, as described in Chapter 2.

Table 9

META-CONVERSATIONAL: Common Ground Pragmatics		
Infra-doings	Breaching	Normativity
A respondent participates in negotiating territories of primacy, resolving modal differences, and tracking content of the Common Ground across conversational instances.	A respondent burdens a speaker by excessively contesting their perspectives, eliding disjunctures, and resisting adding the speaker's (indexed) claims to the Common Ground.	

3.3 Inferring Normativity

In Sections 1 and 2, we looked at the normativity of supporting or obstructing someone in accomplishing their communicative aims, on the basis of whether or not one does one's share of the conversational labour. Additionally, in Section 2, we brought in the matter of affiliative responses, and whether a listener is willing to acknowledge the speaker's perspective, and what they find important about what they are saying, even when these differ substantially from the listener's perspectives and feelings on the matter. This also is a kind of labour, a preserving of a disjuncture rather than giving into the urge to 'resolve' the disjuncture by overwriting the speaker's perspective with one's own. Here, a third element of normativity comes into play. In addition to the matters of conversational labour and affiliative responsiveness, we now have the element of access: when the listener refuses to acknowledge the claims that the speaker is adding to the common ground, there is a line crossed. Refusing to be persuaded can be frustrating, but refusing to acknowledge what the other person is saying goes too far.

Return to the idea of a reality disjuncture. Luke has a certain picture of how reality is, and that picture includes data about claims which others believe, that Luke does not, and so on. When Luke speaks with Kirk, they have a shared Common Ground, which incorporates their context within their discourse ecology, as well as whatever they have made available to each other from their respective points of view. It includes data about what Kirk thinks, believes, likes, wants, and is trying to accomplish, as far as Luke knows. Now, if Kirk makes a claim which Luke finds difficult to stomach, then Luke may resist letting that claim be added to the Common Ground. If Kirk says, 'We need to take responsibility for making this department a safer place for people of diverse backgrounds,' and Luke worries that this claim indicts Luke's past involvement in the department, he may attempt to ignore, gloss over, or brush past Kirk's comment. This is not acknowledging Kirk's addition into the Common Ground, and the normative entanglements it brings to bear.

If Kirk presses the point, Luke may be inclined to respond in such a way that acknowledges Kirk's claim into the Common Ground, but only in a way which mutates it, for his own protection. 'Kirk thinks we need to pander to the masses with some sort of virtue signalling around racial inclusion, even though we obviously do not.' Here, Luke is acknowledging what Kirk said and, in a sense, adding it into the Common Ground, but in a way that is concerning for two reasons. First, Luke is stripping the claim of all its normative entanglements before acknowledging it. Second, Luke is not allowing Kirk to access the metaphorical Scoreboard himself; rather, Luke is trying to broker Kirk's access to the Scoreboard. Luke will acknowledge his own version of things Kirk may have at one point said, but he will not acknowledge Kirk's claims as such.

If we, as interlocutors, have some sort of *obligation* to do our fair share of the conversational labour, then it is unsurprising that we also have certain *entitlements* to make our own contributions. When the familiar complaint is made that a woman made an excellent point in a business meeting, which was ignored until a male colleague made the same point, the complaint is that this entitlement

has been disregarded. The woman's right to access and modify the Common Ground herself, in her own voice, was blocked, and her claims filtered and added in by others instead.

We already know that Jimmy Green had a habit previously of not doing his share of the conversational labour, making it difficult for Gina Blue to say her piece, and that he was reluctant to give affiliative responses to what she says and what is important to her about the points she relays. We would not be surprised, then, to hear Gina admit that she frequently goes into meetings with Jimmy needing to suggest things in such a way that makes him think they were his ideas. If Jimmy, being unwilling to hear the critical aspects of what Gina has to say, has always successfully avoided the normative entanglement that would result from her claims being added to the Common Ground, then it seems Jimmy has quite a chokehold on Common Ground access.

To begin a better habit of listening to Gina, one step would be for Jimmy to let her make her contributions to the Common Ground directly, and to acknowledge whatever she puts in, even, and *especially*, when she puts in claims that introduce reality disjunctures. As analytic philosophers, this notion may sound unreasonably risky, but we should consider what Iris Marion Young says about the democratic, deliberative virtue of reasonableness:

Reasonable people often have crazy ideas; what makes them reasonable is their willingness to listen to others who want to explain to them why their ideas are incorrect or inappropriate...Since reasonable people often disagree about what proposals, actions, groundings, and narratives are rational or irrational, judging too quickly is itself often a symptom of unreasonableness.²⁶⁵

We can sympathise with Jimmy's instinctive wish to block Gina's claims from being added to the common ground, because if her views are as contradictory or threatening to his as he anticipates, then presumably blocking out those claims

²⁶⁵ Iris Marion Young, 'The Deliberative Model', in *Contemporary Political Theory: A Reader*, ed. Colin Patrick Farrelly (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE, 2004), 229.

would be the reasonable thing to do. But as Young highlights, this would in fact be a symptom of unreasonableness. The reasonable thing to do would be to engage with Gina wherever there may be likely disagreements, because disagreements present an opportunity for refining his own ideas.

The same dynamic is at play even when the stakes are not judgements of rightness or rationality, but rather are feelings of security versus threat. Recall the scenario in which Kirk recounts a near-death accident from ten years ago, and Luke falls apart, as if there is some imminent threat. Part of what went wrong in that moment is that Luke was failing to keep a separate evaluative standpoint from his own; he was not distinguishing between how *he* felt about Kirk's story, and what was important to Kirk about Kirk's story. Recall also the department member using epistemic tokens (Oh! Actually!) to settle for the record any questions about her standing with respect to complicity in racial harassment.

The trouble with reality disjunctures is that they itch, so to speak, and the higher the evaluative stakes about the matter about which we disagree, the worse the itch to settle the question. One of the hard parts of listening is that, as noted above, listening involves a willingness to affiliate with and facilitate the conversational aims of the speaker, whilst also keeping a sustained openness to their perspectival standpoint, including whatever risks and normative entanglements that may bring. It takes energy and effort to keep disjunctures in the Common Ground, like holding a hot potato in one's hands. It takes courage and humility to risk letting someone register a complaint or rebuke you, disagree with you or call you to account.²⁶⁶ The greater the reality disjuncture Gina introduces, the more Jimmy has to pour his energy and effort into gathering the courage and humility to let her introduce them and keep them open, rather than settling them for the record—in his favour—as swiftly as possible.

²⁶⁶ As Tanesini notes, humility requires self-acceptance of one's own limitations; see Alessandra Tanesini, 'Intellectual Humility as Attitude', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 96, no. 2 (March 2018): 399–420, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12326>.

That is the view from Jimmy's side. From Gina's side, given the power differential, there is a further trade-off. Sustaining reality disjunctures around morally and existentially important issues may itch, but it is preferable to facing fragmentation, depersonalisation, or dis-integration. If Jimmy's chokehold on the Common Ground forces her to choose between being truthful and being heard, then she faces the fragmenting effects of leaving some key piece of her perspective outside the Common Ground. If she can only speak and be heard when she speaks not as herself, but as an 'acceptable' voice, she then faces the effects of depersonalisation. If she speaks and the clear intention of her utterances is consistently flouted by the outcome of her conversational attempts, she faces the dis-integration of her capacity as an agential, conversational subject.

Table 10

META-CONVERSATIONAL: Common Ground Pragmatics		
Infra-doings	Breaching	Normativity
A respondent participates in negotiating territories of primacy, resolving modal differences, and tracking content of the Common Ground across conversational instances.	A respondent burdens a speaker by excessively contesting their perspectives, eliding disjunctures, and resisting adding the speaker's (indexed) claims to the Common Ground.	A respondent uses their own cognitive/emotional resources to preserve speaker's values, projects, perspectives in Common Ground, even when involving reality disjunctures.

Listening as Labour, Listening as Risk

My proposal, then, is that to begin to listen to Gina, Jimmy needs to undergo a kind of revolution. If Jimmy were a child, or a narcissist, he would need to undergo a Copernican revolution and realise that he is not the centre of the conversational Common Ground (see Figure 1). But as we said, Jimmy usually does better at listening than he does with Gina. Jimmy quite likes to be right, and wants to be known as fair, objective, responsible, and a good leader. Jimmy, like so many of us, has a notion of a Common Ground which is centred around an idealised notion of the truth, and his aim in all conversations is to be epistemically responsible in treating the conversations as opportunities to get nearer the truth.

This works well enough when he is not under threat, perhaps, but when Gina walks in, we start to see Jimmy's idealised, truth-centric Common Ground getting deployed as the basis for epistemic whack-a-mole. This is my diagnosis of Jimmy, as well as of much of what goes wrong in post-Enlightenment dominant discourses. What we claim is a truth-centric orientation turns into a basis for batting away inconvenient truths under the guise of due diligence.

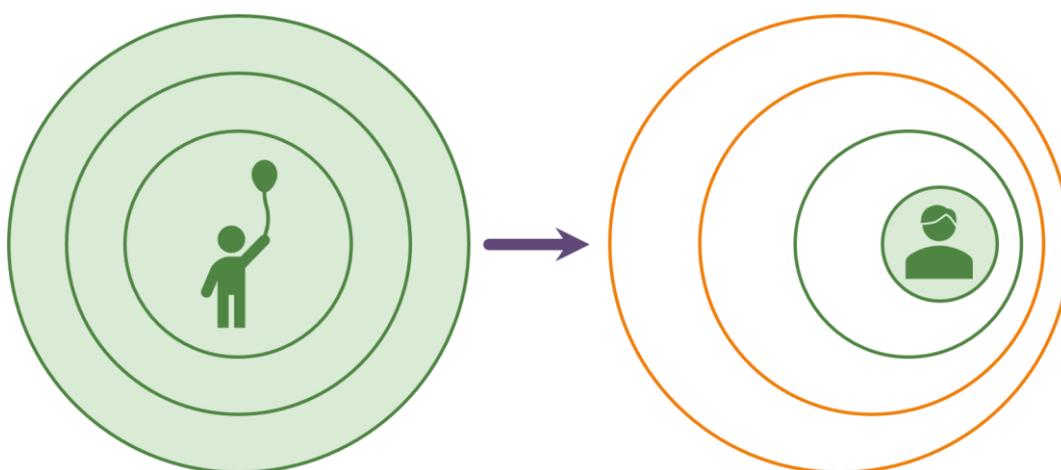


Figure 1: The post-Copernican Shift

What Jimmy needs is a different kind of post-Copernican revolution. Whereas the child must shift from a Jimmy-centric to a truth-centric Common Ground, here, we want to see a shift to a Jimmy-*and-Gina*-centric Common Ground. Like an ellipse has two foci (see Figure 2), the Common Ground has distinct standpoints, and they stay that way. Gina's contributions do not get collapsed under Jimmy's sense of his pursuit of truth; rather, he and Gina join forces in a shared pursuit of truth.

Incorporating multiple centres in the Common Ground means accepting that all claims, even one's own, are perspectively contingent, even when we feel sure. But more importantly, incorporating multiple centres means acknowledging a responsibility for doing one's share of the work, supporting the speaker in accomplishing her communicative aims. It means participating with the speaker actively from the back channel, giving specific and affiliative, but non-

intrusive, responses wherever possible. It means acknowledging the other person's entitlement to make her own Common Ground modifications and to performatively enact changes to the normative context through her speech.

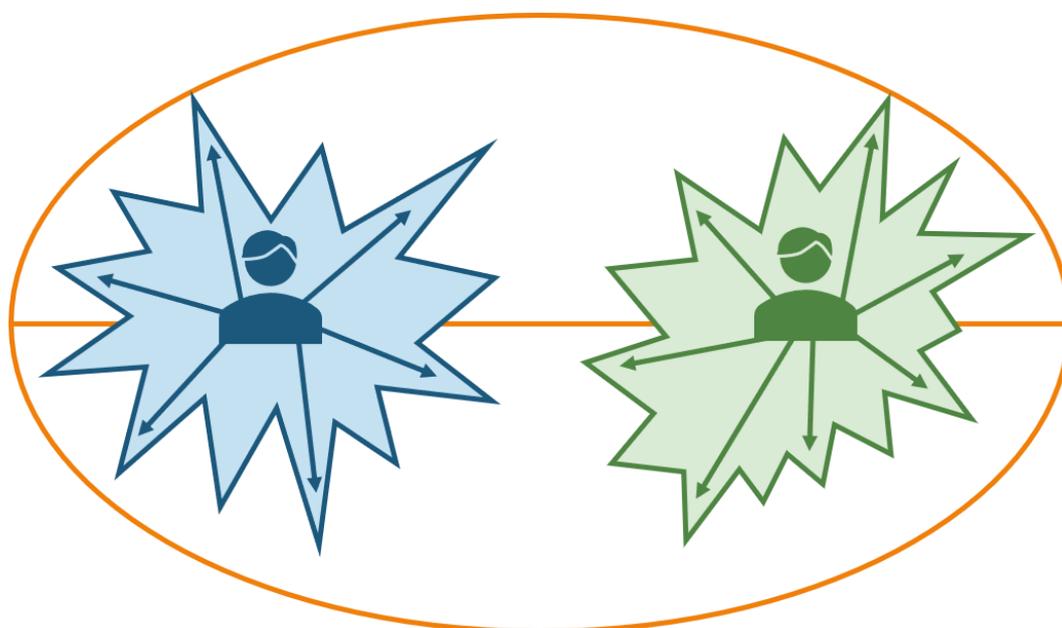


Figure 2: A Jointly-Centred Common Ground

Listening involves downgrading one's own centre from being *the* centre to just *a* centre from which to look out on the Common Ground. In a dyadic conversation, this might look like an ellipse. When we factor in the broader context of the discourse ecosystem, we see how Jimmy's actions toward Gina are part of the system-wide shape of the Common Ground of public discourse. If Jimmy can learn to listen to Gina, and if he can spread this change to those around him, then the centre of public discourse itself can shift to have the plural foci we would expect from a complex, pluralistic ecosystem.

To conclude this chapter, we re-sketch the shift made in Chapter 4, this time with infra-doings (intentions and outcomes) in view, rather than just motivations. When Jimmy Green makes the shift from Inquisitor mode to Listener mode, Gina Blue will notice a difference in their conversations. Jimmy used to play at being obtuse, making her take several extra turns to get her points across.

Instead of letting her tell her story on her own terms, Jimmy used to jump out of the back channel with intrusive responses, blocking her from giving context to her claims, undermining her interpretation in order to dismiss her.

Instead of noticing what is important for Gina about what she is saying, Jimmy would persist in evaluating every one of her claims against the backdrop of the world as *he* sees it, treating her like an item in the Jimmy-centred Common Ground, in which every claim is either true or false, plain and simple. Each meeting he seemed to have forgotten what he had learned about the blues in the previous meeting, so each time Gina had to labour re-establish the blue-centred perspective in the Common Ground and to re-open reality disjunctures that had been conveniently eliminated from the scoreboard.

Table 11

Structural Register	Normativity
INTER-TURN (Conversation Analysis)	A respondent recognises the overall aims of speaker beyond the individual turns, and replies with best fitted second pair parts, obviating need for extra pairs and alleviating the burden on the speaker to advance the conversation.
INTRA-TURN (Interactional Linguistics)	A respondent provides supportive and specific back channel responses, interpreting content as speaker tells it, minimising the burden of effort for speaker to complete turn.
META-CONV. (Common Ground Pragmatics)	A respondent uses their own cognitive/emotional resources to preserve speaker's values, projects, perspectives in Common Ground, even when involving reality disjunctures, and does not broker her access to modify the Common Ground.

Now that Jimmy has made the switch in his policy of responsiveness, he is much calmer about letting her take extended turns, actively participating from the back channel to support her in painting a picture for him of the context and significance of the blue families' concerns. As he lets her tell the story without blocking or usurping her turn, he begins to get a much more integrated picture of the situation. Using his Hawking heuristic, Jimmy gets into the habit of accepting

things Gina says into the Common Ground even when he does not know the reasons for her claims. He comes to trust that she has good reasons, and that if he lets her, she will tell him what they are.

He starts treating Gina's perspective as independently valid and not subject to Jimmy's vetting; what Gina says gets put into the Common Ground—indexed to her, of course, and often not without follow-up questions. Together they are building a jointly-centred Common Ground, with both their perspectives preserved. Jimmy is now putting effort into remembering from one meeting to the next what is in the Common Ground on Gina's side. They still do not always agree, but Jimmy is learning not to elide Gina's perspective out of the Common Ground whenever they stumble on a reality disjuncture—and this happens fairly often. If Jimmy accepts and preserves the reality disjuncture, he thereby has to live with the possibility that he might be wrong about some things, or even in the wrong. It still itches, sometimes, and he has to keep his courage and humility about him when she enacts normative claims which place him under obligation to respond.

The more he respects and listens to Gina, however, the more he realises that he does not need to be afraid of turning out to be wrong: Gina wants as much as he does to promote a thriving school district where all children, green and blue, can flourish. When Jimmy is wrong, Gina is on his team to help fix the issue. Both of them can see the benefits their collaboration has brought about for the district, now that Jimmy listens to Gina.

What remains, now, is to draw together this assemblage of infra-doings and breaches into a single, coherent picture of the normativity of listening, pulling out general principles for guiding our practices and our judgements of others' listening as praiseworthy or blameworthy. That is the next and final chapter.

Chapter 6

Obligations and Entitlements

“Good listening is often as tactile, and visual, as it is auditory: thus neither disembodied nor closed to affect, and neither purely objective nor perfectly rational. It shelters and encloses... it invites and honors trust... it starts from a presumption of, and respect for, the integrity of tellers and listeners.

—Lorraine Code²⁶⁷

“We are responsible and yet not in charge; we cannot control the situation, but we are accountable. This kind of fear can lead to not-listening as well, the reluctance to admit another as a “co-builder of a common world.”

—Susan Bickford²⁶⁸

When we approach the concept of listening, imagining ourselves in the role of speakers, it is easy to support normative claims which hold our interlocutors morally responsible for listening to us. When we approach the same concept but imagine ourselves in the role of listener, it is easy to feel protective of our ‘right’ to screen out voices or claims that we find objectionable or harmful. Both sentiments are reasonable, and a normative account of listening needs to respond to both. Both sentiments pull on us in debates around hate speech, freedom of expression, silencing, deplatforming, and, to be sure, in the ever-flourishing self-help discourses which urge the setting of healthy boundaries to filter out the voices that abuse. For this reason, the question that inevitably comes up in response to any

²⁶⁷ Code, *Ecological Thinking*, 234.

²⁶⁸ Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy*, 153.

discussion of the ethics of listening to people is the question of whether it is ever permissible, or even morally praiseworthy, to *not* listen to someone whose voice one deems harmful.

One too-quick way to answer this question is by appeal to self-defence. It is normally not permissible for me to go around throat-punching strangers, but if a stranger is attacking me and I use a throat-punch to get away, then my action would generally be considered excusable. This response works reasonably well as a heuristic: *'Listen to people, except when doing so puts you in danger'*, but it does not provide a principled basis for determining which situations are those in which a listener is entitled to block her ears against someone's speech. Ideally, we should see obligations and entitlements to *not* listen as being generated by the same normative basis which generates obligations and entitlements to listen and be listened to.

Put differently, we want a clear basis for deciding when and to what extent we must admit someone as a joint perspectival centre in our Common Ground. Conversation is a game we play together, so when deciding whether to play with someone, we might want to know whether or not they can be trusted to play fair. We can derive this basis from the instrumental and conventional norms for the joint activity of conversation, much as the entitlements and obligations of tennis players are generated by the norms which constitute the joint activity of a game of tennis. The task in this chapter is to articulate that resulting broad basis for the moral normativity of listening, the grounding for and limits of our obligations and entitlements to listen and be listened to. This chapter begins with the same rhythm as the last chapter, looking at a body of empirical work—this time another arm of EMCA—followed by application of the concepts to the case of listening. Then we shift gears and look at the bigger picture, bringing together the themes of all former chapters to create an integrated picture of what praiseworthy and blameworthy listening would look like.

First, in Section 1, we orient the collaborative picture of conversation within what should be a familiar picture of joint action, and the kinds of norms

generated by engaging in joint activity. Then in Section 2, we look at how an instance of this particular joint activity is bounded by a framework of relevance, called an *Enchronic Frame*.²⁶⁹ (This is not a frame in the Johnsonian, metaphorical sense used in previous chapters; this is a ‘frame’ in the sense of scaffolding which holds up and supports the overall event structure.) In Section 3, we revisit the various damages and harms covered in previous chapters, seeing how they can be represented on this model. Here we also see how this model gives us a basis for us to think about when we might have a moral entitlement not to listen to someone. In Section 4, we look once more at what Jimmy did right, before closing with an illustrative case study.

1. Generating Obligations and Entitlements

Herbert H Clark argued that language use is a form of joint action, like a duet, a waltz, or a game of chess.²⁷⁰ A duet, a waltz, and a game of chess all have rules which govern the progress and flow of the activity: in a waltz, both parties act simultaneously, and the activity is largely scripted. In chess, the players alternate turns, but the turns are not scripted. In a duet, musicians play scripted parts that are simultaneous as standard, but may include scripted elements of turn taking. If I undertake to play a duet, but I abruptly stop playing midway through and leave my fellow player ‘hanging’, then I have violated the ‘rules’ of duet playing, which include that we progress together through the score. Now it may be that I need to stop for a breather and will signal this with gestures and or make apologies to my fellow player for dropping out; I have violated the rules of the duet in a non-pernicious way. I acknowledge the violation with apologies, and we will together sort out whatever went wrong and try again. The violation does not end our joint activity in the broad sense, but rather triggers repair manoeuvres.

²⁶⁹ Here, as in Chapter 5, I will maintain a capitalised usage of ‘Enchronic Frame’ to indicate that I am employing it as a technical term with a meaning fit for our purposes here, based on but not necessarily strictly following the meaning as used by Nick Enfield; see Enfield, ‘Sources of Asymmetry in Human Interaction: Enchrony, Status, Knowledge and Agency’.

²⁷⁰ Clark, *Using Language*.

Conversation is not scripted; much like an improvisational duet, the conversants follow a set of rules that guide the unfolding of their joint activity, whilst the content of their turns remains up to each participant's choices. Some of those choices may be invalid with respect to the rules of the duet (and therefore trigger repairs), but many of those choices will respond to and feed into the prior and subsequent elements of the unfolding joint activity of musicmaking. What sort of rules are these? Nick Enfield writes, "These are not rules for how a person should act. They are rules for how a team player should act. The rules make sense if you think of their function as regulating the flow of conversation as a kind of group activity. In conversation, everyone involved has a set of implicit rights and duties in the interaction."²⁷¹ The same holds true for chess and for waltzing: if a chess player makes two moves at a go instead of one, then the flow of the joint activity is disrupted, leading to an unbalanced game. If Ginger decides to switch to Foxtrot mid-waltz and collides with Fred, then Fred will be justified in rebuking Ginger for not being a team player, for flouting the rules of waltzing.²⁷²

Enfield continues: "When we cooperate, we enter into a (usually unspoken) pact to join forces toward a common goal. Through this pact, we become morally accountable to that commitment and to seeing that commitment through. Joint action is not just a way of behaving; it implies a special way of thinking."²⁷³ Some cooperative activities are more prescriptive than others. Sitting down in front of a chessboard with someone is tantamount to entering into a pact with that person to play a game of chess—and a commitment to abide by the rules of chess. If one player does not see this commitment through, wandering off partway through or making illegal moves, then the other is justified in holding the other accountable. On the other hand, if players sit down to a game of poker, the pact will be made

²⁷¹ Enfield, *How We Talk*, 16.

²⁷² Enfield, *How We Talk*; Enfield and Kockelman, *Distributed Agency*; Margaret Gilbert, *On Social Facts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992).

²⁷³ Enfield, *How We Talk*, 16.

explicitly, when the players agree on which type of poker game they will play, and what kinds of betting will take place.

Conversation is a joint activity which includes many variations: some are highly formulaic, such as ordering food at a drive-through window, and can be conducted without explicit negotiation because of that formulaic context. Others are flexible and wide-ranging. Negotiation may become explicit when parties are not on the same page: an employee has a meeting with the boss in which the employee seeks a raise, but the boss intended the meeting as a (disciplinary) performance review. When their cross-purposes collide, they will stop ordinary conversation to negotiate what kind of conversation they are having.

Variations of this sort abound, but all conversational behaviour involves interlocutors signing up to a joint project of verbal communication which entails agreeing (more or less) on a shared set of rules. To enter into conversation with someone is to make oneself accountable to the norms which govern conversation. Some of these are familiar: participants should use mutually understood languages, should reply in a timely fashion, should be sincere or appropriately signal if being sarcastic, and so on. Even so, conversation involves an astonishing array of highly sophisticated behaviours which require participants to understand and make themselves understandable; to interpret, to improvise, to coordinate, to monitor the flow of the conversation, and to make repairs when the flow is disrupted for any number of reasons.

Conversation involves one person responding to another person, via the medium of language, and this is, in Enfield's words (above), a very 'special way of thinking'. He explains: 'The cognition that people need for language must of course be found in the head, and in that sense, cognition for language is located in individuals. But much research on how the mind works has shown that cognition is radically distributed. Much of our thinking and reasoning is not done solely between our ears. When we use our brains, we often hook them up to external systems. These may be physical objects, such as pencil and paper or smartphones, that supersize our capacities for memory and reasoning. In conversation, the

external systems to which we hook ourselves up are the bodies and minds of other people.²⁷⁴

Think about some of the phrases we use to describe reasons for initiating an open-ended conversation: I want to ‘get some things off my chest’. I’m not after anything; I ‘just want to talk’. I’m just ‘thinking out loud’. I want to ‘bounce some ideas off you’. I want to ‘run something by you’. The use of these phrases occurs around a specific subtype of conversation, in which the joint activity is that of conversation itself, and the purpose is to gain the benefit of ‘hooking up’ one’s mind to someone else’s for improved processing.

Think how strange and inappropriate it would be, however, if one approached a drive-through window ‘just to bounce some ideas off’ the restaurant personnel. That conversational context is not designed for this kind of hooking up of minds. But one essential step in placing orders verbally is that the cashier reads back the order to the customer as he has recorded it, enabling the customer to check that he has said all he meant to say, and requested everything he would like to request.²⁷⁵ Standard cashier phrases like, ‘Would you like fries with that?’ serve as prompts to help the customer think through their options and aims.

On the other hand, mismatches do regularly happen. A surgeon friend once told me, ‘Sometimes people come see me just because they need to talk to someone. Distinguishing these cases from the ones with more specific medical aims is vital to figuring out what the patient needs.’ A patient may be seeking reassurance and the comfort of having spoken to an authoritative healthcare figure, seeking expert information, reviewing their treatment options, or seeking to jointly evaluate together with the expert the extent to which certain of their bodily experiences should be taken to be causes for concern. Despite the stark

²⁷⁴ Enfield, 12.

²⁷⁵ The purpose in doing so is not likely to be altruistic, here. The cashier wants to check that the customer did not forget to (or miss an opportunity to be persuaded to) add some extra items to their order. Even so, structurally, it is still the case that the cashier is supporting the customer in considering various options. My thanks to David Faraci for raising this point.

differences in each party's access to information and expertise; despite the presence of instrumental ends, the process of speaking with a doctor is nevertheless a joint activity of thinking through a situation together in a certain sort of way—a way not replicated, for example, by running internet searches on one's symptoms.

Contexts contribute to people's expectations for how conversations will go. I do not generally expect people to speak to me on train station platforms if they are not traveling with me, although it occasionally happens. If someone approaches me to confirm the time or which train is expected next, I am not taken aback; we conduct a brief, ends-driven conversation which involves pooling our understandings of the rail service situation to confirm important details. However, if in the course of doing so, the person launched into a long, rambling discussion of details of their personal life, I would find myself perplexed and uncomfortable. This particular discomfort does not arise at a cocktail party, however, where it is expected that conversations will be open-ended and of a personal nature. But in both cases, on the station platform and at the cocktail party, once a person has hailed me and caught my attention, we enter into the joint activity of conversation, and the norms of conversation come into force.

To underscore this point, suppose I very much want to avoid talking to the person hailing me. If I turn and walk away when they are still trying to claim my attention, an onlooker might say, 'I guess she did not hear you.' But if I meet eyes with the person, or in any way acknowledge being hailed, then my turning and walking away will be taken as a personal affront, purposeful and meaningfully connected to the person's attempts to converse with me. The acknowledgement of a hail means that the conversants are now bound by certain entitlements and obligations, which govern the flow of the joint activity of responding to each other for the duration of the conversation through appropriate turn sequences, where

each turn responds appropriately to the foregoing turn and provides the occasion for the subsequent turn. This linked chain of responsivity is called *enchrony*.²⁷⁶

2. The Special Glue

As noted in the previous chapter, conversation analysis is not a branch of behaviourism; the responses elicited by a particular turn are not inevitable or scripted. Nevertheless, as soon as the joint activity of conversation is initiated and the norms are in force, whatever follows a particular turn is taken to be a response to the foregoing turn, whether it fits or not, and will be interpreted as meaningful.²⁷⁷ Enfield elaborates:

The key point here is that human conversation is an exchange of co-relevant moves, not an exchange of simple or planned calls... Something in the conversation machine not only drives the fine timing of conversation; it also provides for meaningful connections between each move that allow us to create coherent conversations without a script. This connection comes from a special glue called relevance.

Relevance is one of the most powerful cognitive components of the conversation machine. There is a deep-seated human propensity to see meaningful connections between events, whether or not the events are actually related. We find it hard not to see events as being meaningfully connected when in fact they are simply adjacent. Many superstitions work

²⁷⁶ Enfield, 'Sources of Asymmetry in Human Interaction: Enchrony, Status, Knowledge and Agency'.

²⁷⁷ Enfield, *Relationship Thinking*, 28–35. For context, Enfield casts enchrony as one of eight levels of connection between behaviour and what occasions it or what it means, as below (p. 31):

Eight Methodological Frames for Studying Human Behavior,

Each Defined by a Distinct Causal-Temporal Profile

Causal	What is the mechanism by which the behavior occurs?
Functional	What is the survival value of the behavior pattern?
Phylogenetic	How did the behavior pattern emerge in evolution?
Ontogenetic	How does the behavior emerge in an individual's lifetime?
Microgenetic	How is the behavior processed as it occurs?
Diachronic	How does an acquired pattern of behavior develop in history?
Synchronic	What is the abstract relational structure of the behavior?
Enchronic	How does the behavior fit in a contingent sequence of moves?

on this basis: If I stub my toe, I might see this as connected with the black cat that just walked across my path.²⁷⁸

The tendency we have to see meaningful connections between events takes on norm-generating force when we commit to the joint activity of having a conversation. Every turn taken is glued to whatever comes before and behind it by the norm of co-relevance. If I chat at the cat and the cat flicks his tail, I may *assume* a relevant, meaningful connection, that the tail flick is a response to my addressing the cat, although this may not be true. But if I speak to a friend, and my friend rolls her eyes, I will take that eye roll to be a meaningful response to what I said.

I might follow up and ask why I have been given an eye roll. Perhaps my friend says, ‘Oh, I’m so sorry, I was rolling my eyes at something going on over there, behind you. What were you saying again?’ Whatever follows my conversational turn *will* be glued to my turn by the assumption of meaningful relevance, so if whatever follows happens to *not* refer to my turn, a rule has been violated, triggering a repair manoeuvre from me (requesting explanation), an acknowledgement of violation from my friend (Oh I’m so sorry), and an explicit ‘ungluing’ of the gesture from the progress of our conversation by positioning the eye roll as a response to something outside the enchronic frame—the chain of co-relevant moves—of our conversation.²⁷⁹

Such a response may work once; I can forgive a friend for being momentarily distracted. But in many cases, people would be unwilling to look past more than a couple such incidents before ‘reading something into’ the friend’s distracted state. Recall the breaching experiments from the last chapter: even once the experimenters explained the assignment to their subjects, subjects remained

²⁷⁸ Enfield, *How We Talk*, 132–33.

²⁷⁹ This talk of ‘ungluing’ an incidental but non-relevant moment from the Enchronic Frame is my own notion, and to my knowledge it is not talked about in this way by relevance theorists. Instead, I take inspiration here from the common philosophical notion of bracketing—we use repair type sequences to bracket out moments which we wish not to be considered by our interlocutors as part of what is happening in the conversation.

hostile and inferred meaning from having been chosen as subjects for the experiments. So strong is our tendency to find meaningful connections that as soon as a commitment is made to the activity of conversation, it becomes extremely difficult to extract any action from the glue of relevance.

The same holds true for how we ascribe meaningfulness to the way an interlocutor handles the Common Ground. Consider the contrast between how the Common Ground looks in each of these two cases: in one, Luke asks Kirk if he would like to come along on a lake trip next week. In the other, Luke asks Kirk if he would rather ride a centaur or a hippogriff. The relevant content of the Common Ground in the first case answers to reality in a way that the second does not, and likewise generates obligations in a way that the second does not. If Kirk agrees to go along on the lake trip, but then Luke leaves without him, Kirk would be justified in rebuking Luke for having failed to uphold the obligation to which he committed himself when inviting Kirk to join the trip.

Such obligations do not arise from the speculative conversation about centaurs and hippogriffs. Kirk would be justified in being astonished if the hippogriff question followed right on the heels of his accepting the lake trip invitation. The implication would be that Luke needs to know for purposes of planning the lake trip what fantasy animal Kirk prefers to ride. If Kirk goes along with this premise, then he might expect to be offered a chance to ride a hippogriff at the lake. If Kirk finds the premise to be too far outside the relevant content of the Common Ground to be an appropriate move in a lake-trip-planning conversation, then he will presumably ask follow-up questions to clarify what sort of transition in subject matter has been made.

A similar picture of expectations arises around conversational participants. If Kirk addresses Luke, and some bystander replies instead of Luke, the bystander's comment is an intrusion from outside the enchronic grain of the conversation. If Luke fails to acknowledge or respond to Kirk in any way, Kirk will likely look for reasons why—Luke perhaps left the room, or could not hear Kirk, or for some other reason has not engaged. We could imagine Kirk realising that he is

now alone, and playfully answering ‘for’ Luke in some silly voice, as if continuing the conversation: ‘Sure Kirk, you can have my boat.’ Whatever he imagines Luke to say would extend the surface structure of the conversation forward, but it fails at that point to be a multi-centred conversation. This means that whatever Kirk imagines Luke to say would not generate the sort of obligations for Luke that would be generated if Luke had made that move himself (Luke has not bequeathed the boat, so no obligation to give Kirk the boat obtains).

This brings us to the first pivotal point of the chapter. Just as the content of a conversation refers to and enacts changes to a multi-centred Common Ground, so also the *activity* of a conversation derives its structure and meaningfulness from the multi-centred Enchronic Frame—that special glue of relevance that causes the actions of the interlocutors to hang together as a conversation. Take away one of the participants—one of the agentive centres—and it is not longer a conversation as such; a soliloquy or apostrophe, perhaps, or a monologue, but not a conversation.

If one chess player departs a game of chess, then the game can no longer proceed; the remaining player is no longer playing chess unless someone takes over the other player’s side. For as long as the game is in play, the player would be wrong to sweep all the pieces off the board or reset them to their starting positions. Once the game is no longer in play, either because it ended or because it was forfeited, the norms which prohibit sweeping pieces off the board into the box no longer apply. When one of the agentive centres of the game disappears, the other agent no longer has the option of being involved in that particular chess game. The joint nature of the activity means that the decision of one agent to exit the game has implications for the other agent. This idea forms the bedrock for what follows.

3. Damages

The argument in previous chapters has been that, according to the folk normativity of listening, the unjust listener harms someone in her capacity as a speaker. If a speaker is silenced, then some important part of her agentive personhood is damaged; her ordinary communicative actions do not receive

uptake, and she is blocked from adding claims into the Common Ground unless they fit with what the interlocutor is willing to acknowledge. We can now explicate this kind of problem in theoretical terms.

First, we take it as granted that the participants of a conversation are bound by the ‘pact’—the entitlements and obligations generated by their joining into the joint activity of conversation with each other—in virtue of the fact that they are talking with each other. (We will address the issue of entering into or not entering into such commitments below.) The participants are bound up in the Enchronic Frame, which means that every move they make is a response to what came before, and begets what follows. Every move is co-relevant, and anything the participants say or do which disrupts the flow of the conversation or the chain of co-relevance will trigger repair manoeuvres, for as long as the conversation carries on. This is the normal pattern.

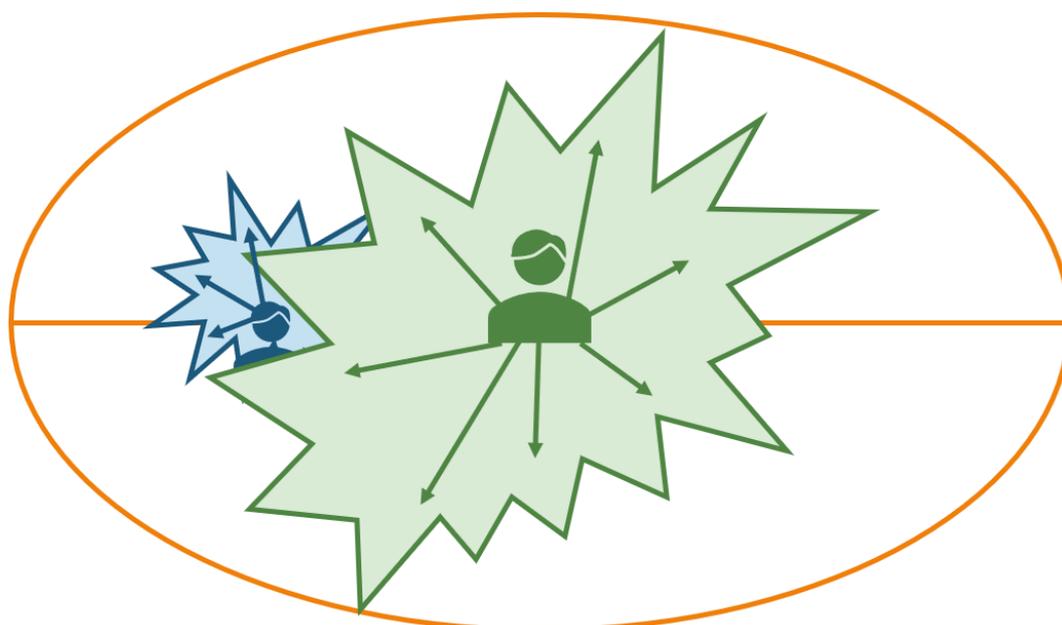


Figure 3: The Enchronic Frame (depicted in orange) holds even when a domineering listener (in green) does not share much Common Ground Access with the interlocutor (blue).

When one move in the conversation is infelicitous—that is, when there is no uptake—the speaker is likely to clarify, to try again, to re-phrase, or to change

tactics. But when the move is infelicitous because the listener has *refused* to grant uptake—in bad faith, as discussed in Chapter 2—the listener has violated the obligations that obtain in virtue of having entered into the joint activity of having a conversation. That is, one of the obligations which obtains is that of tracking the flow of the activity, which includes making sense of how each move refers to what came before, taking the relevance link as meaningful, and endeavouring to understand in what way it is meant to be meaningful by the speaker.

Described this way, in prose, the procedure sounds clunky and burdensome, but recall Enfield's comment that we have a deep-seated propensity to find meaningful connections between events even when there is no relevance gluing those events together. We saw this in the phenomenological aspect of the motivational complex in Chapter 4, and it highlights even further the wrongness of the excommunication move. When a listener refuses to acknowledge the relevance connection between the speaker's move and what came before, the listener is countervailing their own anthropological reflexes as well as violating the obligations which obtain from having entered into conversation with the speaker. We can depict what a problematic listener does using the Common Ground and Enchronic Frame together, for each of the blameworthy listening patterns described in the preceding chapters.

Silencing

The violation in question here can be pictured as in Figure 4 below: by refusing to incorporate the speaker's move into the enchronic frame of the conversation, the listener has violated the rules for how to be 'a good team player' in a conversation. As a result, the conversation cannot proceed as it stands. There are a few options for how this scenario can go. If this is a one-off incident, then the speaker may take on the labour of making specific repair moves to rebuild the enchronic frame around the rupture. If the refusal to listen is persistent and resists repair, or if the refusal occurs in a context of systemic silencing such that the speaker does not have the resources to take on that labour, then the conversation may be aborted.

A middle option is that the speaker may take a beat and start the conversation anew, on different terms, but this is essentially a new conversation. If a chess game suddenly ends because players disagree about the validity of a move, they may agree to reset the pieces and start again, but at this point they are playing a new game. Suppose this option is taken. The speaker has been unable to secure uptake for her speech act due to resistance on the part of the listener, so she starts fresh, reopening the conversation on new terms. In the broad sense, it appears that the conversation continues (the players ‘keep playing chess’), but it does so by accepting the rupture of the enchronic frame and building a new one.

Again, if this is a one-off incident, then the damage is unlikely to be noteworthy, but if the speaker finds that every time she attempts to make a certain move the conversation has to end and be restarted, then we identify the speaker as being ‘silenced’ with respect to that speech act. And if the silencing is persistent, causing cumulative moral damage to the agent, undermining her in her capacity as a speaker, then she may become unable to constitute a subject able to enter into the joint activity of conversation [with this person, on this topic, etc]. The damage she suffers through silencing comes from the fragmenting choice she has to make about whether she will accept the conditions of whoever has a chokehold on the Common Ground. If she says only things her interlocutor is willing to accept, then her speech acts are found felicitous, but if she follows her own intentions and motivations for communicative action, her utterances are treated as breaches of the chain of co-relevance.

One reason why this might happen, as argued in Chapter 2, is that a listener may be unwilling to acknowledge the possibility of how the speaker’s move aims to enact changes to the normative context. For example, if the listener has made sexual advances and the speaker says ‘No, please stop,’ the listener may be unwilling to countenance the possibility that he is in fact being rejected, or that he is doing anything wrong by persisting in his advances. As argued in Chapter 5, if the speaker’s move goes through, then it must be added to the Common Ground in an appropriate way—‘She does not want me to do this’—and the normative

change acknowledged, namely, that she is putting him under obligation to discontinue his advances, on pains of being charged with sexually assaulting her.

Now we have said that the Common Ground allows for disjunctures, but our urge is to settle them for the record. ‘She does not want me to do this’ gets added to the Common Ground, which also contains, ‘I want to do this to her.’ The resulting disjuncture does not, structurally speaking, need to be resolved; indeed, a skilful listener in many cases seeks to preserve the distinct perspectives of the other and so holds open space for such disjuncts to remain. However, allowing disjuncts to remain in the Common Ground also means allowing the inferences licensed by the disjunctive claims, which include normative entanglements. If both claims, the listener’s desire and the speaker’s rejection, are preserved in the Common Ground, the disjuncture licenses certain critical inferences, such as, for example, that there would be something morally wrong with the listener pursuing his desired course of action under the circumstances. Similarly, and more simply, preserving a disjuncture in the Common Ground means preserving the possibility that one might be wrong about something, or in the wrong.

Some Variations on the Above

What we have so far is this: entering into conversation involves committing to the obligations and entitlements of that activity. Speakers are entitled to choose their own next moves; to interpret each move as meaningfully glued to the foregoing, and to have their claims added to the Common Ground in some fashion. Speakers are expected to attend to how each claim is meaningfully connected to the foregoing; to allow each other to add claims to the Common Ground even when this introduces disjunctures, and to maintain the flow—the Enchronic Frame—for as long as the conversation continues. Both speakers can initiate repair manoeuvres, request clarification, and modify the conversation’s progress. Both speakers take partial responsibility for moving the conversation forward and for working around ruptures.

How much of a burden for these tasks falls on each participant is mediated by the kind of conversation, the roles of the participants, and the power gradient

between them. A parent talking to a small child takes most or all of the responsibility for managing and repairing the conversation, because the child does not have the resources to be able to do this. A friend who is feeling stubborn and obstreperous may renege her responsibilities, causing them all to fall on her interlocutor who will likely become frustrated with the continuous stream of misunderstandings.

The above applies to speakers who *have* entered into conversation; the same obligations do not apply to people who are not already interlocutors. We have the freedom to choose, generally speaking, when we want to talk to people and with whom we are willing to converse. If one person does not wish to speak to another person, they are not compelled—at least, not by the structure of discourse—to enter into conversation. The case differs for people with role-based responsibilities. Doctors and teachers, for example, have less elective freedom over whether they will converse with particular patients and students. Even so, medical practices have policies for addressing inappropriate patient behaviour, and teachers have corrective options for handling students who violate social or moral norms. It is beyond our scope here to examine the ways that such institutional structures shape and interact with conversational norms.

We should also note that the focus here is on individuals in conversation with each other. The obligations and entitlements generated by participation in a conversation do not straightforwardly apply to the issue which has come to be known as deplatforming. What we owe to our personal interlocutors does not tell us much, if anything, about what is owed to public speakers by their audiences, or which people are ‘owed’ (if indeed any one is owed) a public platform. When a person is offered a public platform, but the offer is subsequently withdrawn due to widespread political objections to the person’s anticipated message, it is said that the person has been deplatformed. Understandably, people in such positions tend to feel they have been ‘silenced’, in that they have not been allowed to speak where they had expected to be allowed to speak. If deplatforming is a kind of silencing, it is a very different kind of silencing to what we are dealing with here,

since it refers not to the norms of conversation but to norms of publicity, and is not structured by the same kind of mutually-responsive Enchronic Frame. Therefore, we leave the matter of deplatforming aside.

Gaslighter and Inquisitor

The same structure applies with the more extreme forms of cumulative moral damage, specifically, gaslighting and excommunication. As argued in Chapter 2, the aim of gaslighting is to ensure that the Target no longer constitutes an independent discursive standpoint capable of disagreement or accusation. Excommunication does similarly, by predicating the breakdown on the Target having supposedly already ceased to function as a rational discursive participant. When a person is so severely harmed in her capacity as a speaker that she is no longer taken to constitute a discursive standpoint, she is not able to enter into conversation—at least, not on the topics on which she has been gaslit. Her utterances are not taken to be co-relevant in the right way with the utterance of the other for them to become part of an Enchronic Frame.

Whereas silencing in the broad sense is about blocking certain speech acts from occurring as moves in the enchronic frame, gaslighting is about blocking the Target from being able to make [certain categories of] speech acts altogether. A silenced subject may still be able to constitute one of the two foci of the ellipse, one of the perspectival centres of the multiply centred Common Ground, so long as she plays by the rules added by her interlocutor's patterned refusal to uptake certain utterances. She can play along as long as she plays by the extra rules prohibiting certain conversational moves that the other person is unwilling to incorporate into the Common Ground and enchronic frame. The fully gaslit or excommunicated subject is not even able to 'play'.

Disabled in her discursive function, the gaslit subject does not occupy her own perspectival centre, but rather is placed within the epistemic and pragmatic 'Common Ground According to the Gaslighter' (**depicted in green**) by the claims the Gaslighter makes about her. Since the target is not able to participate in the joint activity of conversation, the usual obligations and entitlements generated by

the tacit 'pact' or participation are not in this case generated—and this is the aim. The Gaslighter would be obligated by the rules of conversation to acknowledge claims that the Target adds into the Common Ground, but this obligation does not obtain if there is no conversation with the Target. The Gaslighter would be obligated also to follow the meaningful connections of co-relevance between himself and the Target, which requires on some fundamental level a tacit assumption of parity: we are both speaking subjects saying things. If the Target is not taken to be a speaking subject saying things, then any word-chains she produces would not be acknowledged as adhering to, linking up with, or responding to his own claims in the manner of conversational moves.²⁸⁰

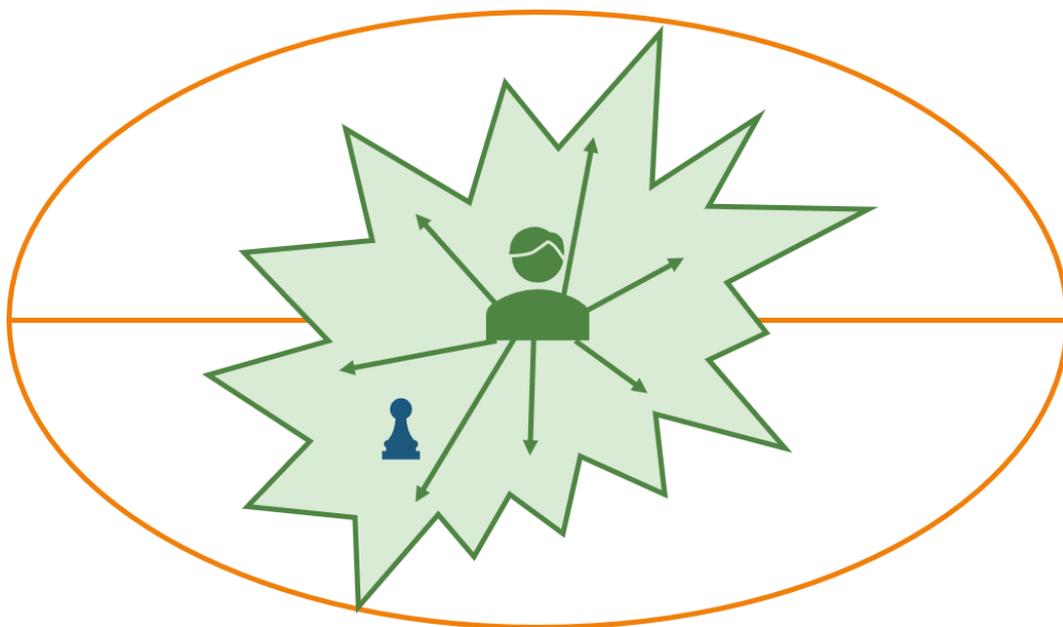


Figure 4: Depersonalisation

²⁸⁰ It is worth noting here that talk about gaslit subjects quickly becomes strange, because in most cases it should be manifestly obvious to outside observers that the gaslit subject is a speaking subject saying things. The Gaslighter acts *as if* she is not a speaking subject saying things, playing a sort of game of pretence to avoid placing himself under the usual conversational obligations. In some cases, however, gaslighting goes so far that the subject is indeed damaged and made unable to participate in discourse; she may be taken by others and even herself to be 'raving' rather than making discursive claims.

The Inquisitor undermines the subjectivity of the speaker in quite a similar way, and also aims to avoid accepting conversational obligations. However, the Inquisitor's move is made from within an established Enchronic Frame, and, at least on the surface, follows the ordinary rules: the Inquisitor looks for the meaningful connection between the speaker's moves and his own. But the Inquisitor claims to find no such relevance link and initiates something like repair manoeuvres—asking for reasons, or testing the rational validity of the speaker's conversational moves, which may resemble a game of epistemic whack-a-mole.

When the Inquisitor does not find a suitably rational relevance link and is 'unable' to repair the Enchronic Frame, the speaker is deemed to have placed herself or fallen outside the rationality requisite for conversational involvement. Whereas the Gaslighter avoids playing the 'game' of conversation with the Target, the Inquisitor plays the game and appeals to its rules and norms in order to rebuke and, finally, remove the speaker from the 'game'. The code phrase for this strategy is, 'I can't talk to you when you're like this.' What it really means is, 'I refuse to listen to you when you say these kinds of things; game over, you forfeit.'

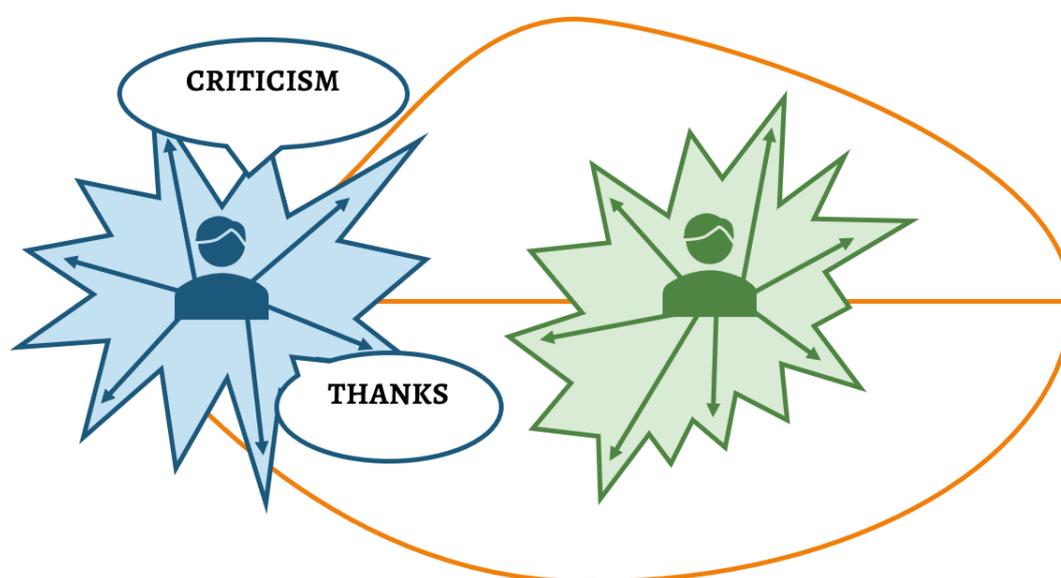


Figure 5: Excommunication

On this view, we judge a listener to be morally blameworthy when they shirk their obligations and denies the entitlements of a speaker. A listener who

violates conversational norms in this way may be frustrating to talk to, and may require an unfair amount of labour on the part of their interlocutors. To the extent that these violations are limited in scope, disrupting the Enchronic Frame and creating some small inefficiencies but not particularly harming the speaker, they may be considered infractions of the rules of conversation but not *moral* harms. But inasmuch as the violations are persistent, recurrent, patterned, and pervasive—to the extent that they lead to an accumulation of moral damage for speakers—we have reason to judge a listener as morally blameworthy. To discern which cases are which would be a judgement call, likely to be disagreed on and debated by aggrieved parties, and would depend on a variety of contextual factors. It is beyond the scope of my project to provide any sort of ‘forensic’ account of the morality of listening to substantiate particular judgement calls of this sort; the aim here is merely to clarify what the basis for such judgement calls would be.

Don’t Have to Listen to This

The violations above are caused by an unvirtuous listener harming a speaker. We can use the same pattern to look at the virtuous listener’s obligations and entitlements surrounding harmful speech and harmful speakers. The premise is simple: just as the vicious listener shirks their conversational obligations in order to avoid normative entanglement and to keep a chokehold on the Common Ground, the vicious speaker also resists being obligated to the listener, in similar ways and for similar reasons. Forms of harmful speech—such as hate speech, objectifying speech, and genocidal speech—function to obstruct, disable, or remove the listener from the Enchronic Frame so that speaker can avoid honouring the entitlements of the listener.

These forms of language use are what I call *discourse dysfunctional*: they are verbal utterances and as such might appear to be discursive, but a look below the surface structure reveals that these kinds of utterances have a peculiar, self-defeating structure. Speech which functions to disable or remove interlocutors from the Enchronic Frame forfeits the entitlements generated by the rules of the joint activity of conversation. Inasmuch as someone’s speech excludes you from

playing by the rules—excluding your moves from the Enchronic Frame, refusing to acknowledge meaningful connections between your claims and theirs, not incorporating your claims into the Common Ground and not acknowledging you as a perspectival centre—to that extent the speaker cannot justifiably treat you as being under obligation to listen to them. There is no acknowledged Enchronic Frame in force, and the Common Ground is collapsed out of commonality, thus, the obligations and entitlements are invalidated all around.

How then should we understand this sort of discourse dysfunctional speech? The harmful speaker issues utterances in a manner that claims to make unilateral changes to the Common Ground. The joint activity—the duet—is not undertaken. I argue that such speech functions in a performative way, a solo or soliloquy, meant not as discursive participation but as a wielding of power. Speech which performatively dominates the other is not protected by entitlement to be listened to, because without another player, without a subject to function as another perspectival centre and to jointly commit to the Enchronic Frame, the entitlement to be listened to does not obtain.

An advantage of conceiving of harmful speech in this way is that it lets us easily account for the complicating factor that harmful speech is very often third personal. Suppose that Jimmy Green and Gina Blue are in conversation and employ hate speech about a third group, **depicted in purple**. Although there is not a purple subject participating in this conversation, the use of hate speech has implications for the Common Ground as understood by both blue and green subjects. Since the harmful speech disqualifies the purple subjects from discursive participation, both Gina Blue and Jimmy Green would presumably then not enter into (legitimate, jointly-centred) conversation with purple subjects.

Now, perhaps Gina is already, in the broader sense, in dialogue with Jack Purple. If Jimmy uses hate speech to depersonalise or objectify Jack, Gina has two options. She might incorporate this into the Common Ground, which would subsequently cause dysfunction in the blue-purple discourse, cutting off her discourse with Jack. This option describes (for example) the radicalisation aim of

some hate speech. Alternatively, Gina might push back against the claim, treating it as problematic and initiating repair moves to prompt Jimmy Green to revise his claim. If successful, Gina's moves result in Jimmy being held accountable for honouring the discourse-capable subjectivity and personhood of purples—a good result, with potential benefits for the whole discourse ecosystem.

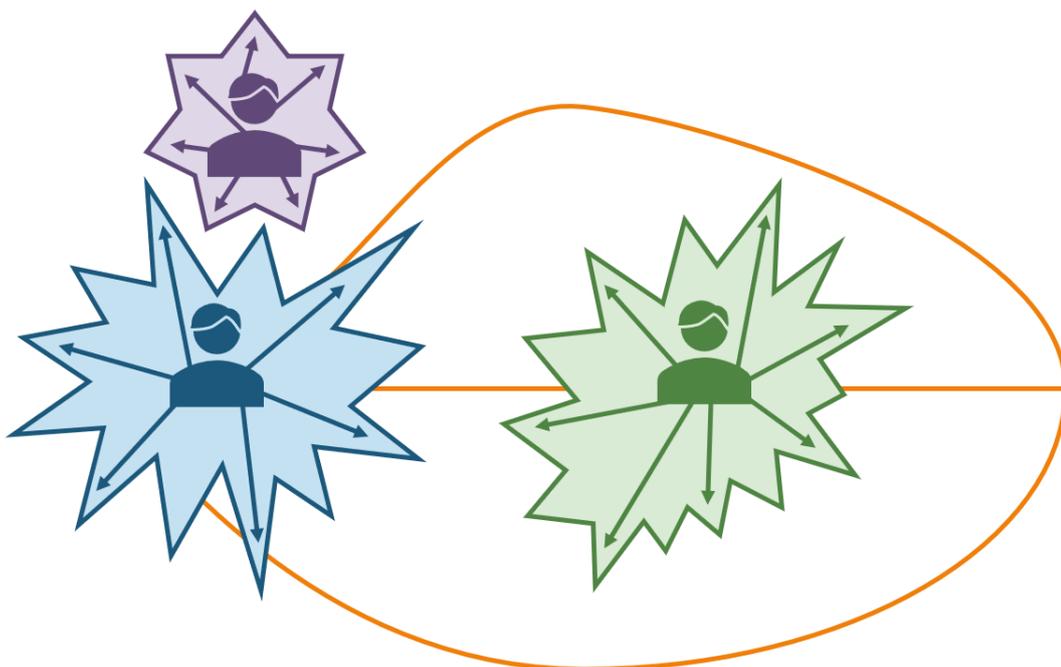


Figure 6: Harmful Speech and Third Personal Harms

If unsuccessful, then there is a disjuncture between Gina and Jimmy in the Common Ground—a disjuncture which has contradictory entailments for Gina. On the one hand, Gina's own commitments entail that she preserves open discourse with Jack Purple, honouring his subjectivity. On the other hand, Jimmy in this case makes discourse with him—a person in a position of power over a domain (the school district) where Gina has concerns at stake—conditional on her either discontinuing discourse with Jack Purple, or at least going along with Jimmy as he propagates hateful claims about Jack Purple. This explanation of Gina's position describes a common experience of allies, who often face the challenge of living with long term cognitive and social dissonance of the kind

Jimmy introduces by digging his heels in on this issue. Perhaps Jimmy is so opposed to the purple subjects that he is *unwilling* to preserve a disjunct in the Common Ground between himself and Gina on this subject. Jimmy insists that Gina must agree with him about purples... if Jimmy has the social capital to pull this off, then Gina will be forced to choose which discursive space will be maintained, that with Jack Purple or that with Jimmy Green. Jimmy has used his position to close off her option of maintaining both.

What this shows us is that performative, third personal hate speech can harm in multiple ways: it can destroy the discourse between blues and purples, or it can even destroy discourse between greens and blues who are 'purple sympathisers'. Therefore, much as first personal hate speech (i.e., Jimmy using slurs against Jack) removes the obligation for Jack to listen to Jimmy, so also third personal hate speech removes the obligation for Jack *and* Gina to listen to Jimmy. This does not solve Gina's problem, if she still needs to negotiate with Jimmy on matters concerning the welfare of children in her community, but it does give us a way to think in clear terms about what is at stake and where she finds a clear entitlement to choose not to listen to someone whose harmful speech is discourse dysfunctional. Happily, as we have said in the previous chapters, Jimmy is on the path to positive change. We return now to add the last piece to the picture of how Jimmy should listen to Gina.

4. What Jimmy Did Right

I have maintained throughout the thesis that when discourse and conversation are functioning well, when ordinary good listening is taking place, the results are often unremarkable. Things go smoothly, and people are not upset, and do not stop to negotiate over the obligations and entitlements of conversational activity. If a boss is reported to be a 'good listener', and one asks the employees what makes the boss such a good listener, they will often be hard-pressed to identify specific features as evidence. We have already considered what Jimmy does on the inter-turn, intra-turn, and meta-turn structural levels to check that he is indeed doing his share of the conversational labour, participating

collaboratively with Gina in accomplishing her aims, and ensuring her fair access to the Common Ground, even when that means sitting with the uncomfortable ego risks and extenuating irresolution that comes of keeping reality disjunctures open, rather than solving them for the record. To complete the picture, we look at what Jimmy does with respect to the Enchronic Frame.

Given the power dynamic between greens and blues, it would be easy for Jimmy to assume primacy over the Common Ground, to doubt or question Gina's point of view and to elide disjunctures in his own favour. To resist this, Jimmy's new policy of responsiveness involves giving Gina primacy over the whole Common Ground. This is not to say that Jimmy automatically agrees with everything she says, but rather that he brackets his own perspective in order to attend to hers. Instead of treating points of difference as disjunctures pressuring to be resolved, Jimmy accepts the cognitive and emotional burden of keeping Gina's claims in at the risk of being himself found to be wrong. This handing over of primacy in the Common Ground entails assuming that Gina's views are at least as likely as Jimmy's to be sound, or even more so; that she has reasons for her views, and that there is parity between the kinds of reasons she has and the reasons Jimmy has for his own views. His main job right now is to take the learner's posture, to learn the lay of the land, and to become at home in the World According to Gina.

As for the Enchronic Frame, Jimmy takes responsibility for maintaining it by searching out the meaningful connection of co-relevance between every move of his and Gina's. If what Jimmy thinks is important is not the same as what Gina thinks is important in their conversation, then Jimmy might ordinarily take her comments to be 'off topic' or to be mistaking which features are most pertinent to their subject matter. Instead, by committing to maintaining the Enchronic Frame (the special glue of co-relevance), Jimmy binds himself to the assumption that each move Gina makes is surely relevant and meaningfully respondent to whatever Jimmy has said.

Suppose Gina is commenting on a need amongst blue students living in food deserts that is going unaddressed. Jimmy mentions the school lunch provisions for students in the school district, pointing out the good programmes that he already has in place to meet student needs. If Gina's next move is to say, 'That does not help, because...' then Jimmy might be tempted to assume that Gina is just making trouble, or failing to see the impact of the existing lunch programme. Instead, being committed to assuming that every move of Gina's is meaningfully connected, Jimmy is now required by his new policy of responsiveness—specifically, by his commitment to maintaining the Enchronic Frame—to assume that if Gina says the problem on her mind is not addressed by the existing lunch programme, then Jimmy must assume that her correction is purposeful and correctly conveys her meaning. He then follows her lead as she points out which issues, for her, are important for solving the problems at hand.

When Jimmy takes up the responsibility for maintaining the Enchronic Frame in this way, he blocks himself from the option to close down his discourse with Gina. No longer does he have the option of deciding that they have covered all they need to and can draw their meeting to a close; nor does he have the option of deciding that he has heard all he needs in order to understand Gina's point of view and no longer needs to hear from her. His policy of responsiveness now commits him to keeping their discourse open—and this moves him closer to fulfilling the deliberative democratic ideal of reasonableness described by Iris Marion Young:

Being open thus also refers to a disposition to listen to others, treat them with respect, make an effort to understand them by asking questions, and not judge them too quickly. A reasonable respectful process of discussion exhibits deliberative uptake; when some speak, others acknowledge the expression in ways that continue the engagement.²⁸¹

At the end of a meeting Jimmy does not say, 'Right, I have heard enough.' Rather, he reasserts his intent to continue listening to Gina in their future conversations.

²⁸¹ Young, 'The Deliberative Model', 229.

He takes Gina's points, which includes exhibiting illocutionary and, in Young's term, deliberative uptake. He expresses his intent to continue trying to understand her point of view.

This ongoing pursuit of understanding highlights the difference between listening to Gina and simply giving her what she wants with respect to the school district situation. Elise Springer emphasises that our motivations for communication run far beyond getting merely instrumental results, and reach toward the sometimes difficult task of achieving a shared attention.

But the difficulty is no worse than for any other account on which communication happens—communication of thoughts, feelings, or even of diseases. Attention is precisely the kind of thing that can be passed from one social being to another; without sharing attention, we would share nothing else (except in the sense in which we can share by coincidence, as two cars share a garage). And if another's attentive uptake never served as a cue to release our attention from an object, the burden upon each individual's attention would be ever increasing and unmanageable.²⁸²

Gina is coming to Jimmy with concerns about significant matters surrounding the wellbeing of her community. Even if she could secure some material gains—perhaps if Jimmy wanted to 'buy her off' with a new school lunch programme so that she will stop challenging him—this would not have the effect of alleviating Gina's concerns. If Jimmy has not shared and understood her concerns—if she had not succeeded in getting him to share her attention to areas of need—then Gina will not be inclined to release her attention from the matter. The real gift of a listener in Jimmy's position is that by giving attentive uptake to Gina's concerns, Gina can rest from attending to them.

Gina has primacy over the Common Ground, and so he takes her view as granted, but he will continue working to understand how the various elements of their shared world give rise to the views that she asserts; why her priorities sit as they do, and why her views might warrant a change in his own. He goes with her

²⁸² Springer, *Communicating Moral Concern*, 112.

terminological choices, even when he does not understand why she takes some terminology to be demeaning. That is something he can make sense of in due course, as she continues filling in the Common Ground for him; meanwhile, he does not contest the choices.

Often we (*we the philosophers*) are instinctively uncomfortable with any kind of suggestion that there might be a duty not to contest something, so we should remember here that the full ecological context is taken into account already in deriving these obligations and entitlements. It is *because* Jimmy is in a position of significant socio-political advantage over Gina, as well as in a position of direct institutional power over her concerns, and because we have established that she is indeed a responsible interlocutor, that this strong obligation arises. We would certainly not want to say that Gina has a reciprocal obligation to do the same, to not contest what Jimmy says, because she is in a very different socio-political and institutional position.

Thus, in each aspect of this policy of responsiveness, Jimmy tasks himself with the ego work of treating his own views as contestable, of constantly confronting the possibility that he might actually be mistaken in his view of the world. He tasks himself with enduring the cognitive dissonance of taking on Gina's views into the Common Ground no matter how sharply they contradict his own. He dedicates cognitive and emotional resources to connecting the dots as Gina speaks, grasping her illocutionary and perlocutionary aims, attending to her voice with elaborated central route processing and resisting the urge to silence Gina or to refuse giving uptake to utterances which challenge him and his views.

The longer Jimmy maintains this policy of responsiveness toward Gina, the more he will grow to see and understand the perspectives she contributes to the Common Ground, and he will come to anticipate the robustness of her reasons. His perception of her voice becomes more rightly attuned, to Gina herself on the basis of their ongoing interactions, rather than to the 'Blue-ness' of her voice. It becomes Jimmy's habituated response to take Gina seriously. There will of course be times when the two disagree; they will have a variety of reality disjunctures

preserved in their Common Ground, not least because they live in two very different experiences of reality. In future, as the parity between them increases, Jimmy will grow to have an apt sense of when a given conversation has been adequately played out and he has a handle on Gina's point of view. This will enable the two to share more evenly the responsibility for maintaining the Enchronic Frame and for negotiating primacy over epistemic territories in the Common Ground.



Figure 7: Advertisement for the Samaritans charity at Edinburgh Waverley; photo by author

Consider the Samaritan

To close, I offer a case study which highlights the flexibility and explanatory value of the account I have put forward. In the course of developing this thesis, I ran my ideas past many thoughtful friends and fellow researchers. One evening, a friend asked me what my account would say about the Samaritans, a UK charity which maintains a helpline, available 24/7, for people in crisis to call and speak to someone.²⁸³ The volunteers who take the calls are not mental health experts; they have no particular expertise and in fact are trained to *not* give advice except, where appropriate, signposting callers to resources they might access for support. The stated aim of the Samaritans is to just listen to people in crisis, giving

²⁸³ For further information see samaritans.org.

the callers space to work out their distress. Calls are anonymous; neither caller nor volunteer knows the other's identity. If someone calls multiple times, they may never speak to the same volunteer twice.

The question posed by my friend was: given these parameters, why is 'being listened to' by an anonymous stranger with no mental health expertise and no advice to give, something that would be valuable to people? Can my model explain what is beneficial about this kind of service? I would not presume to offer a fully fledged explanation of the function and benefits of this service; research exists to explore what the charity itself offers and why it is successful, and it would be the work of other disciplines to assess in detail how it functions.²⁸⁴ Nevertheless, I thought it was an interesting case study for my framework. What is a volunteer doing as a listener in this context? What does their listening offer to a caller? Here is what my framework would suggest: the listening offered by a Samaritans volunteer can be called Enchronic Minimalism. The volunteer holds open an Enchronic Frame for the caller in which the caller has completely free reign over the Common Ground.

Because they do not know each other and the volunteer has no stakes in the game, the caller can explore their thoughts and feelings freely and without challenge. Neither party has enough connection to the other for reality disjunctures to arise; since the volunteer does not know the caller nor details of their life, they have no basis for disputing claims. Because the volunteer is not in a position to offer or prescribe intervention, the caller can articulate and reckon with their more upsetting thoughts, without fear of losing autonomy in the conversation. Part of the value here, it seems, is simply having the space in a conversation to explore difficult thoughts and feelings. Beyond this, there is further value in the fully asymmetric allocation of Common Ground primacy to the caller and Enchronic Frame maintenance to the volunteer. A caller who has been struggling with agency damage, fragmentation, depersonalisation, or any other

²⁸⁴ Stephanie Stace and Clare Wyllie, 'An Evaluation of Samaritans Emotional Support Services: Summary Report' (Samaritans, 2011).

form of dis-integration has the opportunity to bring all of themselves into the Common Ground at once. The 'reality disjunctures' which exist within their experience of broken subjectivity can sit together in the Common Ground, with all the contradictions they entail, and yet the coherence of the conversational structure is maintained. The minimalist listener does not ask the caller to choose which claims are true, or to settle such fragmentation for the record.

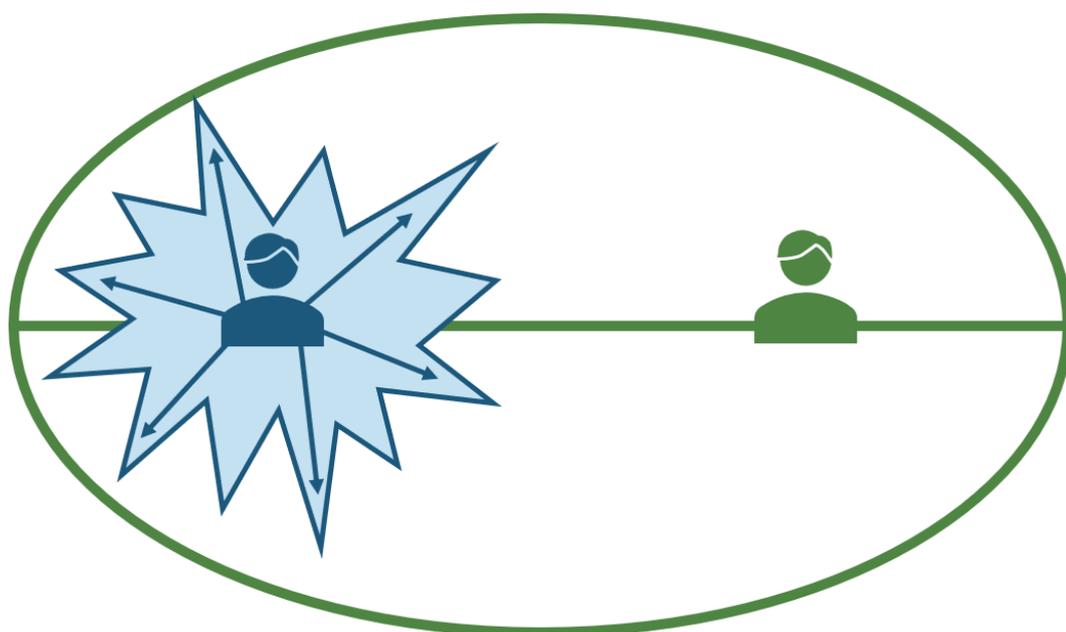


Figure 8: The Samaritan and Enchronic Minimalism - the Samaritan takes full responsibility for keeping up the Enchronic Frame (in green) and gives the caller full domain over the Common Ground for the duration of the call

Instead, what the volunteer does offer through providing the minimally-specified Enchronic Frame is the glue of co-relevance. At risk of overextending the metaphor, where the caller has struggled to re-integrate the fragmented elements of their subjectivity, the open enchronic support gives them a bit of 'glue' to hold things together, as they work out what it is that they need to do in the longer term to secure support for their mental health. The main listening task here is to trace and follow the meaningful connection between each of the moves in the conversation, and a listener who affirms that such meaningful connection is

possible creates space for the caller to rest and begin moving towards re-integration.

Because the volunteer's moves are minimal, mostly back channel responses to underscore their continuing enchronic support, this serves to provide a chain of meaningful connections between the various thoughts and feelings of the distressed caller. The volunteer accepts each of these into the Common Ground without challenge, giving recognition to the caller, and a sense of coherence with the rest of human experience. Enchronic Minimalism offers the caller an experience of social connection, in which all epistemic, affective, and inferential commitments are stripped out of the Common Ground. No matter how sad or scary or shocking their thoughts are, the listening volunteer affirms that they can still find and experience connection and coherence with other people—that they can still be held by the special glue of co-relevance, that thing which provides the ground and grain for human interaction, and affirms their place in our wider discursive ecology.

Conclusions

In this thesis, I have addressed the need for a robust account of listening. I have argued that there are reasons why this normatively significant concept has resisted theorisation in analytic philosophy, given that the frames we commonly use do not make the salience of this concept available to us. I supplied an alternate frame—the Discourse Ecology Model—and through extensive conceptual analysis and interpretation of empirical work in sociolinguistic sciences, I have supplied such an account. In sum, here are the things I established:

1. Listening is a normatively loaded concept with which we express judgements about the normative value of a person's mode of responsiveness—to praise good listening, to blame people who fail or refuse to listen.
2. An exemplar of virtuous listening has the full trifecta of excellences which characterise a virtue: right *perceptions* of what listening requires in a

given case; the *intention* to be rightly responsive to the speaker, and the *skill* required to produce the result that they do in fact listen to the speaker.

3. Speech acts are performative, normative events; each one brings about normative changes, generating obligations and entitlements.

4. To escape the Declarative Fallacy, we need a frame which is *built* to be responsive to the full context of utterances and to highlight the way that to speak is to *do something* in and to the normative context. To theorise the normativity of listening, we need an approach which centres what agents *do*, and do to each other, as listeners: that is, we need a *pragmatic* approach.

5. We replace the Message in a Bottle frame and the Scoreboard frame with the Discourse Ecology Model, which *predisposes* us to a broad, pluralistic focus on the interactions between individual speakers, communities of speakers, social contexts, linguistic resources, and extenuating political and normative factors.

6. Refusal to listen to someone is a kind of silencing based on bad faith withholding of reciprocity—refusing to give uptake to someone’s utterances. Repeated instances of this kind lead to dis-integration between the speaker’s communicative intentions and outcomes, which is the worry that animates the normativity of the concept of listening to someone.

7. Cumulative silencing causes cumulative moral damage and can play a role in various kinds of harm, including gaslighting, fragmentation, and depersonalisation.

8. Listening occurs not as a single action but as a course of action, brought about by a *policy of responsiveness* which coordinates various infra-doings. The infra-doings of the listener include attentional habits, and willingness to give more-than-peripheral attention to someone’s voice.

9. Speakers and listeners function as part of a wider discursive environment. The habits of individuals are shaped by and can also shape their environment; an individual’s habits can change, and such changes can spread through their discursive environment and become institutionalised, leading to social change.

10. A praiseworthy policy of responsiveness coordinates infra-doings at the intra-turn, inter-turn, meta-turn, and enchronic levels of structure.

11. A blameworthy listener does not shoulder his rightful share of the labour and risk involved in the shared activity of conversation.

12. A blameworthy listener does not allow his interlocutor her rightful share of access to modify the conversational Common Ground, but a praiseworthy listener acknowledges his interlocutor's claims, even when this means sitting with the discomfort of leaving reality disjunctures open, rather than settling them for the record.

13. A praiseworthy listener commits himself to upholding the Enchronic Frame instead of forfeiting the conversation when it becomes risky or uncomfortable.

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